

MES Weekly Update

from the Superintendent of Schools

Week of September 7, 2026



Marlborough Elementary School Vision: *To inspire wonder, awe, and curiosity and to motivate young minds to embrace learning.*

We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust our sails.

~ Dolly Parton

"Dolly Parton, a rags-to-rhinestones daughter of Appalachia who for six decades ruled country music and beyond with an outsize personality and down-home wit that enshrined her as one of America's most cherished originals, died on Tuesday in Nashville." From *The New York Times* obituary

One of Parton's enduring legacies was donating more than 300 million books to children through her [Imagination Library](#).

This Week

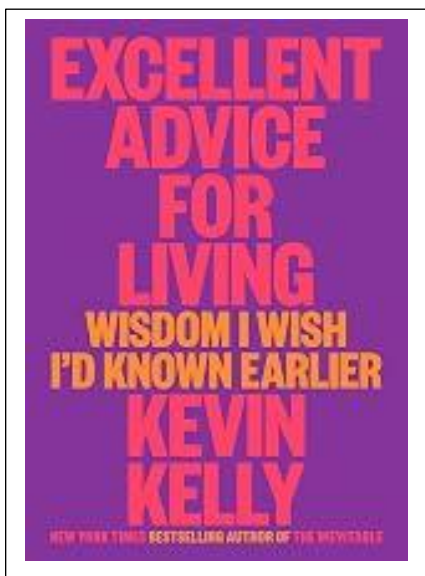
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	NO SCHOOL Labor Day 	 MES Building Committee MES Library 6:30 PM			 Rosh Hashanah begins in the Evening	

Marking the 25th Anniversary | [Link to National September 11 Memorial & Museum](#)



As we mark 25 years since the September 11 attacks against the United States, it is appropriate for us, as adults, to pause and reflect on the events of that day in 2001. While this topic may be more suitable for discussions with middle and high school students, it remains important to remember the lives lost. **Please take a moment to view the Town of Marlborough's tribute honoring the first responders who lost their lives on September 11, 2001. A flag has been placed on the town green in remembrance of each fallen responder.**

Book Recommendation



This week's book recommendation is not a complicated, thick book that will take hours to get through. Kevin Kelly's *Excellent Advice For Living* is collection of simple guidance for a better life in quick snippets. Pick up the book each morning and read one piece of advice and then reflect on that suggestion as you interact with others throughout the day.

His advice is not meant to be consumed all at once. Each day, take a short visit to the book. Highlight your favorites. In the end, you may find yourself wiser. Take a minute to read [a short sample](#). You can find the book on [Amazon](#).

Daniel Pink, author of *Drive*, is a proponent of the book. "If you don't find at least seventeen golden nuggets of advice from Kevin Kelly's list, you're not awake."

Don't measure your life
with someone else's ruler.

When you forgive others,
they may not notice,
but you will heal.
Forgiveness is not something
we do for others;
it is a gift to ourselves.



September/October 2026

Send information on school sponsored events to psmith@marlborough.k12.ct.us for inclusion.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Uncle Sam Day  Happy Grandparents Day 	MES PTO MES Library 6:30 PM RHAM Board of Education @ RHAM Middle 6:30 PM	Wear dots!  Board of Selectmen Town Hall 7:00 PM	National Guacamole Day 	Coffee with the Superintendent 8:30 – 10:00 AM MES Central Office  	EARLY DISMISSAL Professional Development	AHM Dancing with the Stars Click here Ticket info RHAM 6:00 PM 
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
 Yom Kippur begins in the Evening	MES Book Fair					 Stay Unplugged for 24 Hours!
	 Board of Finance Town Hall 6:30 PM			BOE Policy Subcommittee MES Library 5:45 PM Marlborough Board of Education MES Library 6:30 PM		
27	28	29	30	October 1	2	3
		 All Town Boards meeting at MES		 MES Open House Evening 6:00 PM	World Smile Day 	
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	MES PTO MES Library 6:30 PM	Board of Selectmen Town Hall 7:00 PM		National Fluffernutter Day 	NO SCHOOL Professional Development Start of Columbus Day Long Weekend	
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
	NO SCHOOL Columbus Day			Coffee with the Superintendent 8:30 – 10:00 AM MES Central Office 		
		National School Lunch Week				

Notes

Have students swing together to encourage cooperation.

How do we encourage cooperation? Start by looking up the article, **“Want Children to Cooperate? Let Them Swing Together”** by K.C. Compton on the website, *The 74*. According to the author,

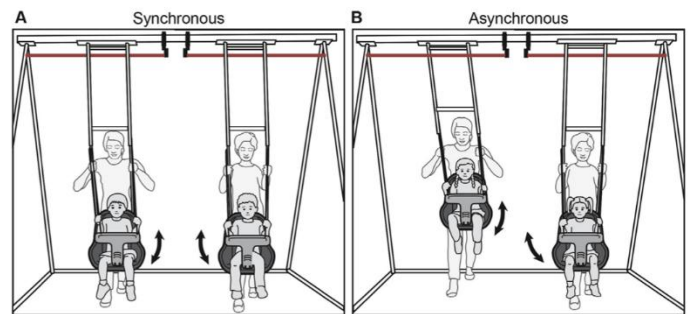
“Cooperation is the bedrock of human society. Because the need to cooperate is so essential to human culture, it seems the simple act of performing a joint task ought to be easy and automatic. But as anyone who has coaxed preschoolers into picking up their toys or managed adults on a project can tell you: working together is not always straightforward.”

She goes on to share research from the University of Washington’s Institute for Learning & Brain Science (I-LABS) where they have been studying the **“effects of synchronized movements on social interactions among young children for years and it turns out that synchrony enhances cooperation”**.

Their study (click if you like research articles) **“shows that the simple act of moving in time with each other can promote prosocial behaviors, such as helping, sharing and empathizing.”**

Researchers built a swing set that enabled two children to swing in unison in precisely controlled cycles of time. This study was set up so the children could see each other’s silhouette but not their facial expressions. The purpose was to determine if the synchronized movement itself, rather than facial or emotional cues stimulated prosocial behavior.

Pairs of children who were strangers to each other were randomly assigned to one of three separate groups: one that swung together in precise time, one that swung together but not in time, and another that didn’t swing at all. After the swinging exercise, the pairs participated in a series of tasks to evaluate their cooperation. One was a “give and take” activity that involved passing objects back and forth to each other through a puzzle-like device. Another was a computer game that required the children to push buttons simultaneously to see a cute cartoon figure pop up.



The researchers found that the children who swung in unison completed the tasks faster, indicating better cooperation than children who had swung out of sync or hadn’t swung at all.

Maybe it’s time to put our elected officials on swing sets and let them learn to move together!

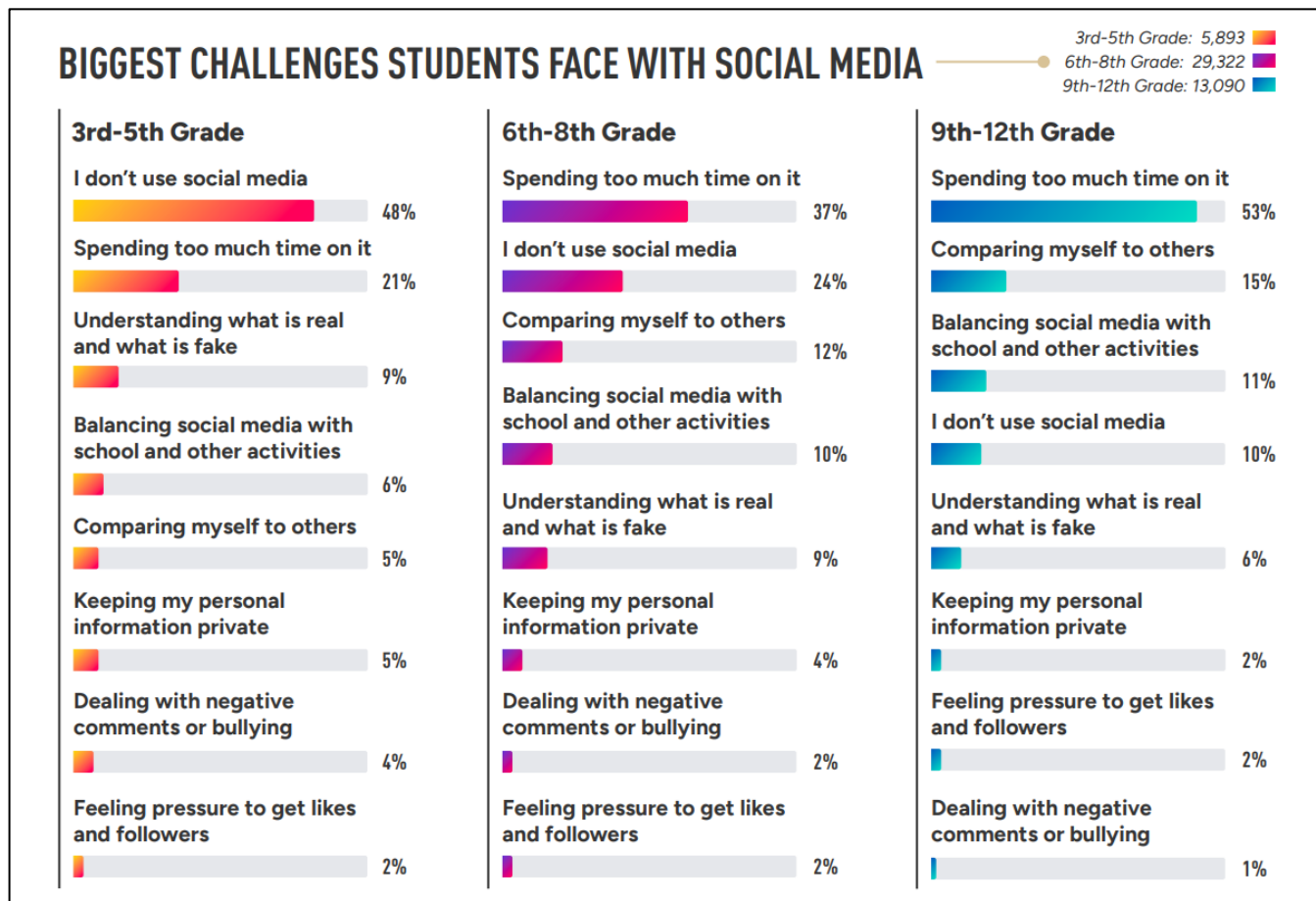
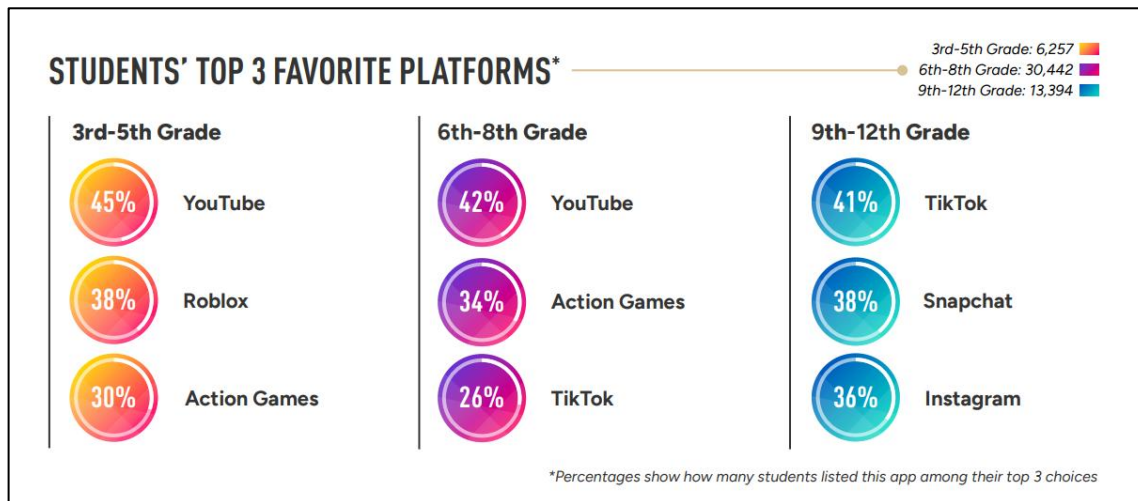
Support AHM and join them for “Dancing With The Stars”

The poster features a purple background with white stars. At the top, it says 'dancing with the STARS' in a stylized font, followed by five white stars and the date 'September 19th, 6pm'. Below this are three numbered sections: 1. 'Purchase Tickets: \$12 advance online \$15 at the door 9/19' with a QR code and a 'BUY' button. 2. 'Donate to Vote for Fan Favorite! September 1 - 17th' with a 'VOTE AT' button and the URL 'ahmyouth.org/fundraiser-events/special-events-and-fundraisers/'. 3. 'Cheer on your favorite dancers! September 19', 6pm' with a location pin for 'RHAM High Auditorium' and the URL 'ahmyouth.org'. At the bottom, there is a 'Click to Enlarge' link.

Tickets are available at the [AHM website](#) for a family night of entertainment that supports our local Youth and Family Services, AHM. Join local stars for ***Dancing With the Stars*** at RHAM High School Auditorium, 85 Wall Street, Hebron CT on Saturday, September 19 at 6:00 PM

On September 1, voting for Fan Favorite began at the [AHM website](#). A panel of judges will pick the overall winner.

Each fall, The Social Institute conducts a survey of students' use of technology. In last year's survey, 53,000 students participated. Details can be found at <https://thesocialinstitute.com/>, along with resources for student well-being.



The article in the section below highlights some parenting suggestions as our students move through these age groups.

Thoughts from the Superintendent



Technology gets a hand-slap, but they still rule...

A Meta settlement concerning youth safeguards captured the headlines recently. Following a recent California trial, Meta (Facebook and Instagram) announced an agreement that could require the company to pay up to \$18 billion. More importantly, the agreement calls for stronger protections for young users, including limits on daily use and restrictions on nighttime access. However, without constant parental monitoring, the protections are not enough. Anyone can adjust their profile name and birthday. It might be a win in court, but it's not a real loss for Meta.

Consider visiting the [Wait Until 8th website](#). There are some valuable resources for parents who want to avoid the cell phone and social media.



The [Wait Until 8th](#) pledge empowers parents to rally together to delay giving children a smartphone until at least the end of 8th grade. Let's protect the elementary and middle school years from the distractions and the dangers of a smartphone. Banding together helps decrease the pressure to have a phone at an early age. Ten years old is the average age children get their first smartphone. You can change this!

A Step-by-Step Tech Guide for Parents Who Live in the Real World

By [Signe Brewster](#) and [Ellen Lee](#) in *The New York Times* Published August 18, 2026

Signe Brewster and Ellen Lee are writers who cover technology. They're also moms looking for pragmatic answers to their own families' tech struggles.

Families are doing a lot of fighting about technology. And how could they not? From the crib to the classroom, raising kids today involves navigating the endless ways they'll interact with a screen.

There's no universal rulebook or timeline for nurturing kids' relationship with technology, and it can often seem like every family is on their own coping with what is actually a collective problem that requires a collective solution.

"None of the challenges that families have around technology are failures of parenting," said Alexis Hiniker, PhD, associate professor and co-director of the University of Washington Center for Digital Youth. **"They are intentional design choices to steer people toward behaviors that are profitable for companies, often at the expense of kids' or parents' best interests."**

But after interviewing 10 experts, combing through reams of research, and surveying more than 750 Wirecutter readers who are parents of kids under 18 earlier this summer, we saw the outline of a new technology rulebook start to emerge. It isn't based on specific screen-time limits or device bans. Instead, it centers on an **intentional approach to introducing technology**, as well as close communication between adult and child.

"We spend too much time talking about whether kids have access to a device or not, and not enough time focused on what we actually want our kids to be doing," said Mimi Ito, PhD, a cultural anthropologist who studies digital youth culture and is director of the Connected Learning Lab at University of California Irvine.

Whether you're just beginning to develop a screen-time philosophy for your young child, debating getting a device to track your school-age kid's location, buying a child their first phone, or granting a teen first-time access to social media, we've compiled expert advice to help you center the values that are important to you from the start — and hopefully have more family conversation than conflict about tech in the years to come.

➤ [How to manage early screen time](#)

By [Signe Brewster](#)

When my first child was a baby, I wondered what all the fuss was about in avoiding screens. She didn't seem particularly interested in the TV, so we didn't watch it with her around. Easy.

My kids are now 3 and 5, and I know every episode of *Baby Shark Hospital Play* by heart. Screens are a constant topic of negotiation in my family, but also in schools and society. About 70% of the parents of kids up to 4 years of age surveyed by Wirecutter earlier this summer said that they allowed their children screen time because they needed a break, and even higher numbers reported using it for entertainment.

The struggle

The American Academy of Pediatrics [links heavy screen use](#) by children ages 0 to 5 to developmental delays, behavioral issues, and poor sleep. But the experts we spoke with said that navigating screen time for young children is much more complicated than introducing screens at precisely the right moment or setting specific time limits. Instead, they emphasized focusing on connection and media quality.

“I think time-based regulations and bans are exactly the wrong thing,” said University of California Irvine’s Ito. “It’s a control-oriented approach that creates more tension between grown-ups and kids rather than parents and kids coming together around shared values.”

Before your child is even old enough to have an opinion about screens, set the guiding principles that will carry your family forward through all of the ages and stages.

The advice

Minimize screen time before the age of 2. Kids learn from adults, not from watching screens, at this age, according to the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#). Focus on social interaction and hands-on play. At the same time, be gentle with yourself.

“Being a parent today is very hard,” said Sunny Xun Liu, PhD, director of research at Stanford University’s Social Media Lab. “Kids need time with their primary caregivers. But ... sometimes parents need a break too.”

Model good media habits. If you don’t want your kids using devices at the dinner table or before bedtime — two places experts consistently recommend banning tech — be prepared to follow those rules yourself. Liu suggests narrating your own interactions with technology. Before dinnertime, for example, you can say out loud that you’re putting your phone away in another room.

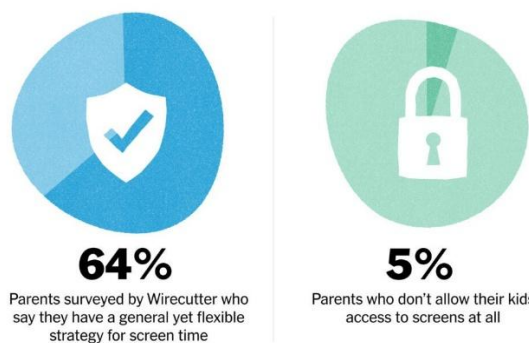
Offer alternatives. Don’t just take away the screen — make sure kids have access to other things that are engaging. That might mean stocking high-quality toys and crafts or planning activities that naturally filter out any screen use, such as playdates or swimming.

Help your kids build self-regulation skills away from a screen. Katie Davis, EdD, professor and co-director of the University of Washington Center for Digital Youth, said that while it’s tempting to use screens to calm young children, it isn’t a good idea.

“They’re learning to associate the screen with calming down rather than being able to calm themselves down,” Davis said. “You want them to develop the habit of figuring out how to ... direct their attention in specific ways, not have their attention be directed for them.”

Look for digital media that fosters social interaction. Davis emphasized that [sitting down and watching a movie with your child is much more valuable than showing them a short video to distract them](#). Or, try a digital tea-party game, where the child sets a table and pours tea before inviting a family member to have a cup. This kind of social interaction is what brings real value to digital media.

“When we see younger kids playing with these kinds of apps, they kind of self-interrupt to bring other people into the play,” said University of Washington’s Hiniker. “When someone asks them a question, they’ll respond, and there’s just a lot more social interaction and a lot more of an invitation into a shared experience.”



NYT Wirecutter

Choose high-quality content. Hiniker recommends seeking out a few high-quality apps and then setting a password so that kids can’t access more without a guardian’s permission. If parents don’t have time to vet every piece of media, they can use a site such as Common Sense Media for recommendations. Wirecutter also has a list of our [favorite learning apps](#).

Meryl Alper, PhD, an associate professor of communication studies at Northeastern University who also works in children’s media, suggests that parents look for a “walled garden” such as PBS Kids apps, where kids get the independence of choosing content for themselves but parents can trust that they’ll find only high-quality media.

Learn to recognize dark patterns. Hiniker studies what are known as [dark patterns](#) — design choices in games, content, and apps that aim to extract data, money, or time from the child. That might be a video game where the character dies if they stop playing, for

example, or an app that suggests making time-sensitive in-app purchases. Instead, seek out media that allows the child to set the pace; if they stop playing, the game stops and waits for them.

Know that repetition in content is okay. Parents might remember that when *Blue's Clues* premiered on Nickelodeon in 1996, the same episode would air Monday through Friday. Today, kids might be conditioned to expect a new show every day, but that actually goes against research behind shows like *Blue's Clues* that found that **children learn through repetition**, Alper said.

"There's almost a little bit of self-sabotage, because parents maybe desire more novelty than their kids do," Alper said. "It's okay to ... stick to two different shows over the course of a couple months, because your kid is gaining familiarity with those characters, with the format of the show."

The takeaway

While kids are still young, before they're clamoring for their own phone and social media accounts, align technology use with your family's priorities and values. For one family, scrolling on devices together on the couch might count as quality time, while another family might choose to leave smartphones by the door to prioritize screen-free conversation. Whenever conflict arises over screen time, trace the problem back to whatever value it's butting up against.

Parents are still in charge of the when, what, and how of screen time at this age, but you can look for opportunities to grant kids independence in making small choices. As your kids grow and expectations change, build trust with regular communication and a commitment to your values. Focusing on your relationship with your child is what will lay the groundwork for the more complicated screen-time negotiations that lie ahead.

➤ How to track (or not track) your kid

By Signe Brewster

I grew up at the edge of a 100-acre forest. The neighborhood kids and I would veer off the trail in search of giant puffball mushrooms and muddy creeks. We'd climb into treehouses built by children long grown up, and we'd give a wide berth to the old man in the illegal deer-hunting blind.

I could tell you the story of how the freedom to roam the woods made me the person I am, and it would probably be true. But through my adult eyes, now that I'm the mom of two little kids, some of those memories terrify me. I see the loose floorboards in the treehouse, I see the little neighbor boy wading in the rushing creek supervised only by other children, and I see the gun in the hunting blind.

The struggle

It will take courage to allow my kids, who are just 3 and 5, a similarly free-range childhood — the sort of childhood that many people lament has been lost to screen time, overscheduling, and stranger danger.

I sometimes wonder if tracking my kids' location might offer some sort of middle ground: a way back to childhood independence that would also comfort me as a mom. Wirecutter has [an article that covers location-tracking devices](#) such as AirTags, smartwatches, and smartphone apps, and they're clearly popular among parents: **Among the more than 750 parents Wirecutter surveyed earlier this summer, 39% said that they tracked their kids, and tracking was progressively more likely the older kids got.**

But even in the name of granting additional independence, I worry what effect location tracking could have on my kids.

"The risk is that parental surveillance sends a message to children that the world is unsafe, and it contributes to helicopter parenting, which can reduce agency and autonomy for children, particularly as they get older," said University of California Irvine's Ito. "It also signals lack of trust, or can erode trust between parents and children."

The advice

Talk to your child about tracking. **Don't secretly monitor your child or impose a tracker on them without bringing them into the conversation.** James Gilmore, PhD, an associate professor in the department of communication at Clemson University who studies datafication and wearables, suggests asking kids how they feel about tracking and whether they think it's useful. Parents might find that while an elementary-age child shrugs off tracking, a teenager might reject it on the grounds of wanting to be more independent. A kid with a device might prefer calling or texting in one situation and tracking in another.

Consider using tracking for transitional periods instead of permanently. A parent could temporarily track a child who is walking to school on their own for the first time, or a teenager who has violated trust and is in the process of regaining it. **Tracking could be "a stepping stone for a parent to grant more independence,"** Ito said.

Build a community with your child's friends. **It's easier to balance independence with keeping tabs on your child if you're on the same page as their friends' families.** If kids know the bounds of their freedom — and perhaps have access to communication devices such as a [Tin Can](#) (a modern landline-style home phone) or [walkie-talkies](#) — their world might open up.

Research data-collection practices. Tracking generates data, and Gilmore said it's worth researching how the company behind a tracking device will use your data. Are you okay with marketers' buying your location data to attempt to sell you things? At the same time, you can contextualize tracking and datafication for your kids; explain what companies do with the data and tell your child how you feel about your own data being used.

The takeaway

If you want to track your child, we can walk you through the [best apps and devices](#) to do so. But in the end, it's a choice that's best made as a reflection of your family's needs. Think of tracking as a potential tool to grant additional independence — not as a given that could come at the expense of your relationship with your child or their growing autonomy.

➤ [How to introduce a kid to their first smartphone](#)

By [Ellen Lee](#)

There is no “right” or “perfect” time to give a smartphone to a child. Only one thing is for certain: **Getting one is a significant, defining, watershed moment for kids.**

Having a smartphone opens the door to a new world of independence. Even with restrictions in place, kids can go places, access and share information, and socialize in ways they couldn't before. And it's all at their fingertips, wherever they are.

The struggle

Like a growing number of parents, I opted to wait until eighth grade before giving my daughters a smartphone. I felt trepidation, fearing what they might encounter through their phone. Bullies? Strangers? Stuff meant for adults? And I felt resignation, knowing that they needed one as they prepared for high school and developed their independence.

The **Wait Until 8th movement has gained steam recently**: More than 155,000 parents have now signed the [pledge](#), up from 100,000 a year ago. But many factors affect when a child gets a phone, such as family circumstances, medical needs, and whether the kid is ready — or not. The American Academy of Pediatrics, the organization of pediatricians that sets guidelines for child health, doesn't list a [recommended age](#).

More than half of kids have their own smartphone by the time they turn 11, according to a [Pew Research Center report](#). In our Wirecutter survey of hundreds of parents, more than half of those with a 13-year-old said their child had a smartphone, and nearly all parents of 15-year-olds said their child had one.

But as more [studies](#) sound the alarm on kids' smartphone use, parents of younger kids are thinking twice about giving one to their child. In our survey, 25% of parents with kids ages 11 and under said they planned to wait until their kids were 16 (or older) to give them a smartphone. More than half of parents with kids under age 8 said they planned to use a flip phone in lieu of a smartphone.

Several years ago, Ashley Zwick, a parent in Westport, Connecticut, gave her older son a basic phone in middle school since he had to travel on his own after school. But she held out with her younger son, who won't be getting a phone of any kind until he starts high school this fall.

“We've tried to tell him that we've learned more,” she said. “Sometimes it looks like it might be unfair, but it really is just getting smarter and making new and different decisions based on new information.”

The advice

Ask yourself if they're ready. Before you hand your child a smartphone, look for [signs](#) of maturity: Are they responsible with their belongings? A smartphone is an expensive item to lose or break. Are they able to follow rules (yours and their school's)? Do they make good decisions on their own?

Set clear expectations and rules. Consider having your child sign a [contract](#) or create a [plan](#) that outlines basic rules and responsibilities for using their phone. Let them know if you'll be monitoring or spot-checking it.

Help them secure their phone. Teach them about their digital footprint, passwords, the importance of keeping personal information private, and the risks of interacting with strangers online. Turn on the phone's [safety features](#), including those that protect the phone if it gets lost or [stolen](#).

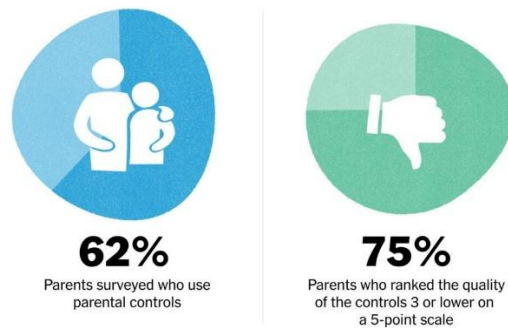
Coach them on phone and text messaging etiquette. **Before your kids text, post, or share something, remind them to [ask themselves: Would you say this to someone's face?](#)** Do you have permission to share that conversation or picture? And if they receive or see a harmful or hateful message, how will they respond?

Keep an eye on group chats. **As fun as group chats can be, they can also be fraught: A 2026 UK [survey of tweens and teens found that group chats are a common place for bullying.](#)** In a [study focused on cyberbullying](#), more than half of surveyed students reported that they had deliberately been left out of a group text. Large group threads, meanwhile, can become spammy and distracting. Kids may feel the pressure to pile on, or to be funny or edgy and take it too far. Talk through these scenarios with your child, including when and how to slow things down, mute, block, or leave a group chat, and when and how to [report cyberbullying](#).

Encourage healthy digital habits. Show them how to turn off notifications and enable features such as the iPhone's [Do Not Disturb](#) and [Focus](#). Have them try [different strategies](#) to resist the temptation of [mindless scrolling](#) or playing around on their phone. They're likely already aware of [brain rot](#), but it helps if they understand exactly how screen time affects their brain. Keep in mind that not all games and apps are problematic: Consider downloading [kid-friendly apps](#) that make the phone useful, helpful, and a way to engage with the world.

Protect your child's sleep. Consider setting up a place to charge the phone overnight that's outside their bedroom. Research has found that smartphones interfere with sleep, with more than half of teens using their phones between midnight and 4 a.m., according to a [study](#) published in JAMA Pediatrics in 2026.

"It's a slippery slope," said Jason Nagata, MD, a pediatrician specializing in adolescent health at University of California San Francisco and lead author of the study. "Many kids are not trying to stay up late, but if they get a notification, or if they're waiting to hear back from someone, that anticipation can impair sleep."



NYT Wirecutter

Use parental controls, but know their limits. Through [parental controls](#) such as Apple's Screen Time and Google Family Link, you can set screen-time limits; block apps, web browsers, and social media; and manage who can contact your child.

But experts say it's one thing to supervise and another to surveil. "Constant surveillance is not developmentally healthy, especially as they move into their teenage years," said University of California Irvine's Ito. Kids need to learn independence, and constant surveillance hinders that growth. Instead, offer feedback and guidance. "It's like, 'Ooh, that was an icky video. What did you think about that? That wasn't so cool,'" Ito said.

Parental controls also have technical limits: For instance, Apple's Screen Time can't filter or monitor what your child sees on YouTube. And kids are notorious for circumventing parental controls or finding loopholes, such as watching explicit videos on Spotify, or surreptitiously buying themselves a cheap burner phone.

In more than five years of testing parental controls and having conversations about them with parents, I've heard time and again that they're glitchy and tricky to navigate, and sometimes they just don't work. More than 60% of the 750-plus parents we surveyed said that they used parental controls — but most found them lacking. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being terrible and ineffective and 5 being great, 75% ranked the parental controls they used at 3 or lower.

Be ready to spend time managing and coaching your child. As your child gets older, the conversations will become more nuanced and complicated. You'll help them figure out how to navigate concerns such as peer pressure to follow online trends. Look for teachable moments. "There's no such thing as one big talk," said Linda Charmaraman, PhD, a senior research scientist and director of the Youth, Media & Wellbeing Research Lab at Wellesley College. "They're going to be faced with different dilemmas at different junctures."

The takeaway

Before giving your child a smartphone, make sure they're prepared and ready for the responsibility. Parental controls can help, especially in the early days, but they aren't set-and-forget: Kids can find ways around such controls, and the features don't often work the way you want them to. Instead, use them as a jumping-off point and plan on regular check-ins and conversations about healthy phone use with your child.

➤ [How to help your child develop healthy social media habits](#)

By [Ellen Lee](#)

Is there a teen who isn't on social media? My two teens certainly are.

Nearly all teens use YouTube, and about six in 10 use TikTok and Instagram, according to a 2025 Pew Research Center [survey](#).

Social media opens another door for kids and teens to connect and interact with people online, share information about themselves and their lives, and consume content tailored for them.

But social media has come under intense scrutiny in the past couple of years, with heated [congressional hearings](#) and [landmark trials](#) against tech companies. Concerns about social media's effects come from both sides of the aisle: Both [past](#) and [current](#) US surgeons general have issued warnings that screen time, particularly on social media, is linked to poor mental health for teens.

The struggle

A 2024 Common Sense Media [report](#) found that a quarter of teens are on social media almost constantly throughout the day, and nearly half of those surveyed said they couldn't control their use of social media or that they used it for longer than they intended. Almost three-quarters said they unconsciously reached for social media when they were bored, and nearly half suspected that social media had reduced their attention span or ability to concentrate.

It's no surprise that parents fret about allowing kids to join these platforms.

"Our greatest friction is over social media," said one Wirecutter survey respondent with three kids ages 14 through 17. "The kids think it is crucial to their social lives — we see strong negative effects."

Most social media companies set 13 as the minimum age for creating an account, but about 50% of kids ages 12 and under have found ways to get on, according to [Common Sense Media](#). The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) suggests waiting until at least 13. In our survey, more than 50% of parents said they held out or planned to hold out until age 16, many of them likely inspired by psychologist [Jonathan Haidt's](#) 2024 book, *The Anxious Generation*.

For better and worse, social media is a primary way for information to be broadcast and shared, as well as for communities (particularly [vulnerable communities](#)) to find one another. At my daughter's high school, for example, administrators, coaches, and student leaders use social media to get the word out about school-related news. My daughter, the co-founder of a student club, posts on Instagram to recruit members and promote events, like her classmates do. Prohibiting social media for your teen until 16 means they [might not have access](#) to news and information that would keep them involved at school.

The movement to wait until 16 comes from the expectation that older teens will be more mature and their brains more fully developed such that they're ready to handle the challenges of social media. Research suggests that [young teens](#) may be particularly susceptible to [mental health](#) struggles linked with using social media. A [study](#) of kids ages 9 to 13 also found that those who spent an hour or more on social media per day performed worse on reading, vocabulary, and memory tests two years later. And many more [studies](#) seek to fully understand the [effects](#) of [social media](#) on kids.

Following the lead of [Australia](#), legislators in the United States and other countries are contemplating laws banning social media for teens under 16, something that the majority of US residents support, according to a 2026 Pew Research Center [survey](#).

The advice

Ask yourself if they're ready. Social media is designed to keep you scrolling, and pulling away can be hard, especially for kids, whose brains are still developing. Look for [signs](#) of readiness such as self-confidence, critical-thinking skills, and the ability to follow rules.

Review social media feeds together and talk about how the algorithm is designed. Before your child sets up their own social media profile, sit down with them and show them how social media feeds can differ based on factors such as who they follow and interact with and what they click on. Encourage them to curate their feed and their friends.

Remind your kid that what they see isn't always the whole or true story. It's easy to fall into the comparison trap of social media, such as with aspirations regarding [beauty](#) and [masculinity](#). [Young teens](#) are still forming their identities, which may make them especially vulnerable. For instance, in one [study](#) of middle school students, researchers found that those who reported feeling worse about their body image because of social media, as well as those who followed celebrities, checked their feeds more often and were more likely to have symptoms of depression.

Talk to your child about how most people share only their best moments, and that photos and videos can be edited and filtered. Explain too that the situation has only been exacerbated by AI and the ability to easily create and modify images.

Help your child find a middle ground. Teach them to check in and be aware of how they're feeling when they use social media, said Jennifer Berger, executive director of the nonprofit Ready Set Screen and the creator of the [Social Media Driver's License](#), an online training program for kids. Do they feel good if they've been scrolling for hours? In addition, it isn't only about monitoring the time spent but also checking if it's somehow interfering with their life, said University of California San Francisco's Nagata.



7%

Parents surveyed whose
12-year-old has access
to Instagram



74%

Parents whose 16-year-old does

NYT Wirecutter

Don't hold them back too much. Telling teens not to post or to interact with anyone online can backfire, said Wellesley College's Charmaraman. "That means that they never get to join anything. They never get to join any groups and feel like they belong," she said. "They're just like somebody that looks in from outside." Passive scrolling, especially [doomscrolling](#), can be unhealthy.

Recognize that parental controls are limited. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok each offer their own set of parental controls. Not only does that create a burden for parents and caregivers, but as one report found, [many of the safety features fail](#). Teens find ways to get around the controls, such as having a secondary "[spam account](#)" that isn't meant for adult eyes. Parental controls for the phone, such as Apple's Screen Time and Google's Family Link, meanwhile, can block and limit time on individual social media apps but otherwise have limited app monitoring.

Coach them on social media posting. Turn on social media privacy settings, such as restricting what other people can share about you. But keep in mind that, as with the rest of digital media, there should be no expectation of privacy, even if you've set an account to private. Remind your kid that future employers, coaches, college-admissions officers, and others may look at their social media.

Build trust so that they can come to you if something happens. Kids are naturally wary, because they fear that their parents will overreact and demand that they delete all their social media accounts. It may sound cheesy and is easier said than done, but Berger recommends repeating this message ad nauseam to your teen: "If you ever run into a problem when you're using your phone or social media, please talk to me. You will not get into trouble. We will figure it out together."

The takeaway

Social media is hard to avoid for teens. While parental controls can be a useful tool, they don't offer full protection. Help your child develop [social media literacy](#), including an awareness of how social media is designed and how it can affect the way they feel. Encourage them to come to you if they see, encounter, or interact with something or someone troubling.

➤ [How to set free a tech-smart young adult](#)

By [Ellen Lee](#)

My older daughter leaves for college this fall, making the great big leap into adulthood. Soon I won't be able to nag her to put down her phone, get enough sleep, or finish her chores and homework before scrolling. She'll need to manage her screen time — and her life — on her own.

Months ago, I turned off parental controls, and on her 18th birthday, I received an email from Apple announcing that she could now manage her own Apple account. She can elect to leave our family account — though for now, she prefers to remain, because the Family Sharing feature offers access to music and apps.

I'm excited for her, but I'm also nervous.

The struggle

Young adulthood is a vulnerable period in life. A 2023 [Gallup survey](#) found that 39% of college students reported feeling lonely; in another, 2024–2025 [survey](#) of college students, 37% reported experiencing depression.

Many young adults will be living away from home for the first time, meeting new people, and acclimating to a new environment. A smartphone can be a lifeline, connecting them to home and old friends. But at the same time, it can also get in the way. Turning to screens and social media may [increase](#) loneliness rather than ease it, since excessive use might crowd out opportunities to meet and connect with new people in real life.

The advice

Let go before they go. "Let's teach them while they're actually in the house," said Wellesley College's Charmaraman. She found that kids who had tight screen-time restrictions all their life didn't know how to regulate themselves once they were on their own. Instead, loosen the rules over time, knowing they might make mistakes, which you'll still have the opportunity to address.

Equip them with tools to manage their screen time. Devices such as the [Brick](#) and apps like [Clearspace](#) can help. Like a nagging parent, these tools create friction so that it's not so tempting to pick up the phone: The physical Brick device locks you out of your most-used apps, while Clearspace makes you take a deep breath (or do squats, push-ups, or steps) before opening one. Unlike parental controls, these tools are available for teens to use on their own.

Encourage them to touch grass. Literally. In a small [study](#) of about 370 college students, those who spent time outdoors reported [lower stress and depression](#). "You want to help them navigate those pros and cons [of tech use] and digital balance on their own," said University of California San Francisco's Nagata.

Have faith. Apps and games are designed to lure you in, and no matter your age, it can be hard to pull away. But over time, young adults mature and start to recognize that technology can be counterproductive, said Charmaraman. They realize that they can take a break, turn off notifications, or turn on airplane mode. "There's also a joy of missing out," she said. Start preparing your teen for digital independence before they leave home. Equip them with their own screen-time tools and have conversations about strategies for using technology responsibly on their own. Then be ready to let them take the controls.



Marlborough Elementary School - Better Together For Children

Our mission is to educate, challenge and inspire each individual to excel and become a contributing member of society.



Join the Superintendent for a cup of coffee and conversation at the Central Office at MES from 8:30 – 10:00 AM.

Thursday, September 17
Thursday, October 15
Thursday, October 29



No taxpayer dollars used for coffee or supplies!

If you have questions, come in for coffee at your convenience with the Superintendent of Schools.

E-mail Paul Smith at psmith@marlborough.k12.ct.us or call (860)295-6236.

Family Resources State of Connecticut 	Mental Health Resources 	Emergencies GET HELP 24/7 Call 2-1-1 in CT 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: 988 Crisis Text Line: 741741	MES School Calendar 2026-27 	Important Annual Notices from MES
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Total Number of Days Absent	Acceptable Reasons for a Student Absence to be Considered Excused	Documentation Required within 10 Days
1-9	Any reason that the student's parent or guardian approves.	Parent or guardian note or email to the appropriate school email address.
10 and above	- Student illness - Religious holiday - Funeral - Mandated court appearance - Extraordinary educational opportunity pre-approved by the Superintendent of Schools. Contact the school for further information.	Parent or guardian note or email to the appropriate school email address and additional documentation as required and outlined in the Board of Education's Attendance Policy #5113 .

Build the habit of good attendance.

[View Marlborough Board of Education Policy 5113 - Attendance](#)



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The Marlborough Public Schools does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national/ethnic origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, status as a victim of domestic violence, Veteran status, disability in its programs, activities, and employment practices, status as a victim of sexual assault, or status as a victim of trafficking in persons. Equal access is provided to Scouting America and other designated youth groups.