

## Smartphone Free Childhood

Connecting, empowering and uniting parents, educators and regulators to delay smartphones and social media, establish phone-free schools, and safeguard the use of technology in education.



# A Parent's Guide: Talking to your teen about delaying social media

Explaining your decision to wait longer before allowing access to social media platforms, clearly and empathetically, is crucial for getting your teen's understanding and cooperation. The key is to shift the focus from "what they are losing" to "what they are gaining" - like focus, deeper connection, and mental well-being. It's hard, we know!

**It's important to emphasise that it's "no for now" but not "no forever"!**

Start by validating their feelings and acknowledging that many of their peers may already have social media. **You might say:**



*"We know this is hard, especially when so many of your friends are online. We're not making this decision because we think social media is bad or wrong. We're making it because we love you, and our job is to protect you and set you up for long-term success."*



## The "Why": Focusing on the Brain and Well-being

Start by making it clear that this decision is about caring and support, not punishment or control. The teenage years are a critical window of growth and vulnerability, and the science shows that the timing of social media access really does matter.

### The Brain Is Still Under Construction



*"You're in the middle of a major brain renovation right now, especially the parts responsible for impulse control, self-worth, and decision-making. These areas don't fully mature until your mid-twenties. Social media is designed to target the part of the brain that craves instant rewards and peer approval, which makes it much harder to manage when those systems are still developing."*

### Increased Vulnerability to Comparison



*"During adolescence, you're forming your identity and figuring out who you are. Constant exposure to curated 'highlight reels' and idealised bodies can increase anxiety, lower self-esteem, and fuel self-doubt. By waiting, we're giving you time to build a strong sense of self, based on your values, skills, and real-world achievements, before adding that pressure."*

### The Sleep Factor

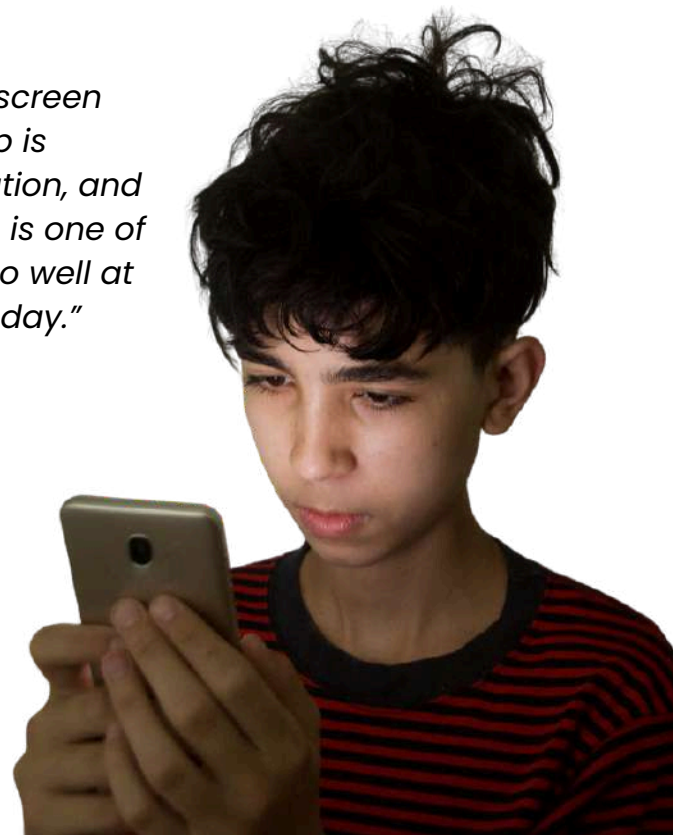


*"Social media content, combined with screen light, is a major disruptor of sleep. Sleep is essential for learning, emotional regulation, and managing stress. Protecting your sleep is one of the best ways we can support you to do well at school and feel more balanced day to day."*



#### Tip: Add in a comparison:

*"Just like we delay driving, alcohol, or certain other freedoms until the brain is ready, social media is another adult environment that requires maturity to navigate safely."*





## The “What We’re Gaining”: Building Real-Life Skills

Shift the focus from what they’re missing to what they’re actively gaining. This delay isn’t about restriction – it’s about using the time to invest in offline skills and experiences that build a resilient, confident adult. It’s future-proofing!

### Deeper, Stronger Friendships



*“When you spend time with friends in-person, your relationships tend to be more meaningful and supportive. You learn how to read body language, tone, and facial expressions – essential skills for friendships, relationships, university, and the workplace. We want you to build real connections and practice these essential skills.”*

### Time, Focus, and Freedom



*“Social media quietly consumes hours every week. By staying low-tech, you’re gaining time – time to read, create, play sport, learn new skills, or explore interests like coding or art. You’re also gaining freedom from constant comparison and pressure to perform online.”*

### Less ‘Digital Drama’



*“A lot of stress in teen life comes from group chats, screenshots, rumours, and miscommunication online. Keeping things simpler reduces unnecessary drama and protects your emotional energy. We want your school years to be shaped by growth and positive experiences, not online conflict.”*



#### Tip: Reframe

*“This isn’t about keeping your world small – it’s about helping you build a strong foundation before the digital world gets too loud.”*





## Addressing the “Exclusion” Concern & Creating a Collaborative Plan

For most teens, the fear of exclusion is the hardest part of delaying social media. Acknowledge this openly. Feeling left out is real, and dismissing it only increases resistance. and resentment

### Acknowledge Their Feelings First



*“We know that having less access might mean you feel left out of some online conversations, and that can be frustrating and upsetting. That feeling makes sense, and we’re not ignoring it.”*

**REMEMBER!** →

**Validation doesn’t mean changing the decision. It means showing respect for their experience.**

### Strengthen the In-Person Social Life



*“We’re committed to supporting your friendships in real life. That means helping you see friends, hosting hangouts, giving lifts, planning outings, and making space for connection. The strongest friendships are built face-to-face, not through a screen.”*

**REMEMBER!** →

**This reassures them that connection isn’t being removed – it’s being prioritised**





## The Compromise (When Appropriate)



If you allow limited tech, explain it clearly and calmly:

*"You can use certain apps to organise a group study session or make plans. But once you're together, phones should stay away, so the time is actually about being present."*

**REMEMBER!** →

**Clear boundaries reduce ongoing negotiations.**

## Make Them a Partner in the Plan



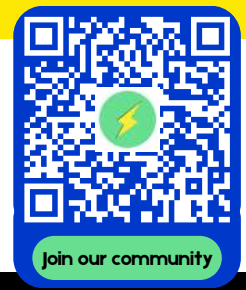
Invite them into the conversation:

*"We want to hear what feels hardest for you and what would help. Let's figure out together how to keep you socially connected while staying low-tech."*

**REMEMBER!** →

**Involvement increases ownership and reduces resentment.**





## Setting Clear Benchmarks & Expectations

### Set a Review Point – Not an Open-Ended ‘No’

*“We’ve decided that we’ll revisit this decision at [age 15 / 16]. That gives you time to mature and build the skills needed to handle social media more safely.”*

**This gives teens hope and a sense of fairness**

### Offer Safer Ways to Stay Connected

*“To help you stay in touch, we can focus on messaging-only options. This allows planning, jokes, and connection without the constant scrolling, comparison, and pressure of feeds.”*

**This gives teens alternatives to focus on**

### Co-Create the Rules for the Future

*“When we do introduce social media, we’ll create a Family Media Plan together, including time limits, content boundaries, shared access and parental controls - so we can guide you. Our goal is to teach moderation and responsibility, and mentor you, rather than police you.”*

**This gives teens a sense of family and unity**

## Tips for the Conversation

- **Choose the right moment:** Talk when you’re all calm and not rushed.
- **Listen before defending:** Let them speak without interrupting or correcting.
- **Give them agency:** Ask, “What would help you feel connected while we delay social media?”
- **Be consistent:** Once decisions are made, enforce them calmly and as a united front with the support of all caregivers.



## What to Say When They Push Back (Scripts for Tough Moments)

**“Everyone else has it.”**

*“That might be true, but our job isn’t to follow the crowd. It’s to make decisions that support you, even when they’re unpopular.”*

**“You don’t trust me.”**

*“This isn’t about trust. It’s about timing and support. We trust you, we’re just choosing to introduce this when your brain and coping skills are stronger.”*

**“It’s not fair.”**

*“Fair doesn’t always mean identical. Fair means giving you what you need at this stage of your life.”*

**“I’ll be left out.”**

*“I hear how big this feels right now. Our goal isn’t to isolate you, it’s to help you build strong friendships in ways that don’t put extra pressure on you.”*

**“You don’t understand.”**

*“You’re right, your world is different from the one we grew up in. We have read up on the research and science of how harmful social media can be, and that’s exactly why we’re being more thoughtful about how and when you access it.”*