

Recommendations for Phones and Personal Digital Devices At Hill School

Introduction

This document is intended to be useful to parents who are looking for guidelines for introducing their children to the technology and culture of smartphones and similar devices, such as tablets and smartwatches. Based on our experience as educators, we see many children struggle to navigate the digital world and can anticipate many of the challenges and struggles that are associated with these devices. We are offering these suggestions and guidelines because we believe that when important adults in a child's life are aligned, that helps them develop character, confidence, and grow strong and healthy.

Hill School Policy

We begin by reiterating Hill School's policy regarding personal devices with internet connectivity: we discourage children from bringing them to school, but because we understand that there may be reasons parents need to communicate with children after school, we recognize that bringing a phone may be necessary. In that case, the phone, smart watch, and any other personal device with internet connectivity should be turned off and in the bottom of the student's backpack. Teachers who see a child's phone or smartwatch will confiscate it, and the parent will be asked to pick it up from an administrator.

Suggestions and Guidelines

Children in Grades JK - 3

We believe young children in these grades should not have cell phones or other portable devices that can connect to the internet or make calls.

Children in Grades 4 - 8

Many families decide to give children phones at some point during these grades, but other families do not, feeling it is more appropriate to wait until high school. Families who decide to wait should know that they are not alone, no matter what a child may say. We believe that the decision to wait until a child has graduated from Hill School is a reasonable and appropriate decision for some families.

The decision to provide a child with a phone is also appropriate for other families. One option that we believe parents should consider is to provide a flip phone (or similar simple device), so that the child can make and receive calls but not access applications or the internet. If the goal is to provide a way for parents and children to communicate outside of school, we believe this can be a good choice. If you would like resources for considering when to provide a smartphone, [this article](#) may be helpful.

Other parents might elect to provide a smartphone, and there are good reasons for making this choice as well. If parents choose to provide a smartphone for their child, we offer the following recommendations and suggestions:

- Make it clear from the outset that the phone belongs to the parent, and not the child. The parent typically purchases the phone and pays the ongoing bills. Consequently, it is entirely reasonable for the parent to establish ground rules for its use, including:
 - The child should provide the parent with all passwords and necessary login information
 - The child should obtain parental permission for downloading any applications
 - The child should expect that the parent will have access to and monitor all written communication on the phone
 - The child should expect the parent to establish time limits for phone use, and to remove the phone at certain times. In particular, we strongly believe students should not have access to phones when they are doing homework, and we strongly recommend the phone be in a different room when a child is sleeping.
- When introducing a child to a smartphone, the parent should plan to invest time discussing the significant responsibilities of owning and using a smartphone. Some key points we recommend discussing are:
 - The difference between a private conversation in person and a text message, which should never be assumed to be private
 - The durability of posted and texted material, which may be deleted but never really disappears
 - The importance of online etiquette. Would a child be comfortable with anyone reading what he or she is writing online? Parents? Teachers? Grandparents?
 - The constant possibility that a post or message is not only being read by the intended audience

As a final note, we recognize that when children are learning new skills, mistakes are inevitable. Often, it is through mistakes that children learn best, and this is a normal part of childhood growth. Parents should anticipate that, no matter how good their intentions and how thorough their introductions, children with smartphones will make mistakes. At Hill School, we are happy to help parents navigate any challenges or problems that arise, but of course we have less control over what happens outside of school, and we certainly will always respect a family's desire for privacy. In the event that children's mistakes on these devices carry over to the school setting, we will assist those involved with navigating terrain so they can be happy and healthy.

These guidelines are only a beginning, and we think many parents would find these and additional resources helpful. These resources may be found [here](#) and on our website under "Parent Portal".