SMARTPHONE FREE CHILDHOOD

THE PARENT PACT

A step-by-step guide to making a Parent Pact in your school

Once a group of parents all agree not to give their children smartphones, the peer pressure is instantly reduced and the social norm starts to change. But creating and implementing a successful parent pact takes time and careful consideration.

So - using best practice examples from parents who've already made successful pacts in their schools - we've created this step-by-step guide for how you can create one in yours.

Our Parent Pact process:

Step 1. Form a small working group

Step 2. Engage your parent community

Step 3. Engage your school

Step 4. Conduct a survey

Step 5. Create your pact

Step 6. Sign the pact

Before starting this process, remember that this is a sensitive issue, particularly for parents with older children or with SEND children who may have specific reasons for requiring a smartphone.

Always start interactions from the perspective that everyone wants to do what's best for their child, whatever choice they make. The more collaborative and inclusive and the less judgemental you can be, the better.

It also goes without saying that every school is different, so feel free to adapt it to fit the unique needs of your community.

We'd love your input on this process too, especially once you start working through the process. Please email community@smartphonefreechildhood.com with any feedback - or put your comments directly into our working Google Doc version of this document.

Step 1. Form a small working group & do your research

- Find a few like-minded parents in your school and form a small working group – ideally four or more people. This will not only prevent your own burn out, but allow you to harness your collective skills

- Identify who within your group is best placed to lead on communicating the pact idea to other parents (consider someone with a warm and non-combative communications style)

- Gather as much evidence as you can to support your case. Check our linktree for some great resources to read and share with others. In our experience, the more evidence-based the source, the better.

Step 2. Engage your wider parent & carer community

- Share the movement to your class Whatsapp group. If you're not sure what to say, you could use the suggested message on our [website](#).

- Find out if you can speak with all class reps, and get them onboard to share comms with their class/year

- If you haven't already, consider starting a dedicated Smartphone Free Childhood WhatsApp group for your school (you can [link it](#) to your SFC regional Whatsapp group), and invite other parents who feel the same to join.

- Gather as many parents as you can for a face to face meet-up to find out where everyone is at on the issue of smartphones. Read our guide to talking about it without judgement or division [here](#).

- You could organise an expert speaker to come to your school and give a talk on the latest research around digital safety and smartphones. See our evolving list of speakers [here](#).

Step 3. Engage with your school

Arrange a face-to-face meeting with your headteacher. If you're not sure what to say, check out the [template letter](#) on our website. At the meeting, find out how they feel about smartphones in school and what their official smartphone policy is. Empathise and acknowledge the pressure they are under.

Go with an open mind and don't assume your school will necessarily be in agreement or be willing to act. It is far preferable to get their buy-in and agreement, but also don't be put off – parent-led initiatives can work too!

Step 4. Conduct a survey amongst the parent body to gauge views

- Survey your parent community to find out the current smartphone picture in your school. Creating a survey is very easy on Google Forms or equivalent. You can use our template questions provided in the comms pack below.

- Ideally your school will agree to send out your survey on your behalf via the weekly newsletter/ParentMail etc.

- If they don't, use the class WhatsApp, printed flyers with QR codes or old school letters. Even a simple WhatsApp poll posted to each class group about whether they'd consider delaying giving a smartphone to their kids is useful.

- Allow 7-10 days for people to respond. Send a reminder before the survey closes to ensure you get the maximum response you can. Remember that any response rate over 50% is considered good!

- Once you have your results, analyse them and think about the best approach for your school. If the majority are open to a pact (including those who say they're not sure), then forge ahead with the next steps. If possible, meet with your school leadership to communicate the plan and get their agreement.

Step 5. Create your pact

The school pact is entirely **parent-led and voluntary.** Using Google Forms, write your pact – we suggest using one of the following two options.

Acting in the best interests of my child and their community, I make a pact with my fellow parents to...

- •Not get my child a smartphone over the course of the next year. I will revisit this pact with my fellow parents a year from now to reconfirm my commitment. *Or... [DELETE AS APPROPRIATE]*

- •Wait until my child is at least 14 before giving them a smartphone
- •Wait until 16 before allowing them access to social media

Please note:
There are two options for wording. At Smartphone Free Childhood we suggest people delay getting their child a smartphone until they are 14, because the evidence shows that 11-13 is the most dangerous time for children when it comes to social media. However, you may feel that asking parents to delay to a different age works better for you. Some schools have found that making it a pact not to get one for the year ahead (to be revisited again each year), is a more achievable goal.

Based on our experience, we'd recommend that if you do use the 14-16 wording, you preempt any suggestion that it is in fact better to give a child a smartphone in Year 6 (in the more controlled space of primary school) rather than in Year 7 when they start secondary (a new and less controlled environment). E.g flagging that most social media apps have an age restriction requiring users to be at least 13, and highlighting the scientific case for delaying until at least age 14.

For example, this huge global study of the first generation of children to be given smartphones, who are now adults. It found that **the younger they got their first smartphone, the worse their mental health is today.** https://sapienlabs.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Sapien-Labs-Age-of-First-Smartphone-and-Mental-Wellbeing-Outcomes.pdf

Step 6. Sign the pact

Signpost parents in each year group to the pact via a message to their class WhatsApp group.

Aim for a minimum of 10 children out of a class of 30 taking the pact – from our experience, this is definitely an achievable goal. It also creates a tipping point that quickly shifts the social norm around smartphones.

Every parent that signs the pact can be added to the SFC WhatsApp group for the school (if they're not already, and if they give their agreement in the Google Form). This enables parents to see who else has signed and support each other ongoing in this decision. (If they then want to start their own class-specific groups they're welcome to do so.)

Very important final step! Register your pact with us at community@smartphonefreechildhood.com so we can keep track of the data of how this movement is building across the country. Tell us: the name of your school, total number of pupils in the school, how many have signed the pact in total and across each year.

Once you are registered you will be invited to join our monthly online 'pact surgery', where we can share ideas and troubleshoot any issues together with others engaged in the same pact process.

If you have chosen the shorter pact for the year ahead, remember to ask parents to recommit to the pact annually. Once parents know what the pact is all about, this should only involve a short email recap on the concept along with a new pact form to sign for the year ahead.

The Parent Pact comms pack

Below you will find template emails, class WhatsApp messages and the questions for the parent survey that you'll need in the process of creating a pact in your school. Feel free to edit them to fit the unique needs of your community.

Message 1 – a parent-led first email about smartphone campaign to all parents/ carers at the school

Dear parents,

What age is the right age for a young person to get a smartphone? It's a topic that has rarely been out of the news of late. We're writing to you today as part of the new grassroots parent movement Smartphone Free Childhood to raise awareness of the subject within our school community.

Technology presents many incredible benefits and opportunities, but how best do we navigate it at this critical stage of pre-teen development? We know this can be a controversial subject and that everyone wants to do the best for their children, whatever approach they take to this particular challenge.

However, with new research being published showing a clear link between the age a child receives their first smartphone and mental health issues in young adulthood, we're keen to be proactive as a community and take steps to help protect and support our children while we still can. To do this, we'd like to know what you think about it too.

We'll be sending out a short anonymous survey via xxxx in DATE and urge you to take part. The more feedback we have, the wider the conversation – and the greater the impact we can make together.

Message 2 – Introducing survey (email)

A parent-led message to all parents/carers of children at the school
—

__Parent & carer survey to gather opinions on children owning and using smartphones__

Hello,

__We're writing today as part of the Smartphone Free Childhood campaign to invite you to take part in a short survey to gauge wider opinion on children owning smartphones.__

We are conscious that this can be a controversial subject and that everyone wants to do what's best for their children. You may already know your stance and we're certainly not trying to overrule personal decisions.

However, unequivocal research is finding that despite all the benefits of keeping in touch, young people's mental health and wellbeing is increasingly being damaged by smartphone usage. A global study produced last year found a strong link between the age a child first starts using a phone/tablet and their mental health as young adults (you can read the summary report here and full report here).

With this in mind, we would like to be proactive as a community and take steps to help protect and support our children while we still can. We are mindful that this technology is here to stay, and it does present many benefits and opportunities, so we are keen to ensure our children navigate and engage with it in a positive way.

The survey should only take 5 minutes and is completely anonymous. We would like to hear your views and appreciate and thank you for your time in completing it.

We will share a full report of the survey findings and proposed next steps as soon as possible.

Best wishes,

Names (on behalf of WhatsApp group*)

* Everyone is welcome – please contact us to be added to the group

Parent & carer smartphone survey questions (Microsoft Form)

Message 2 included as intro at start of survey, plus following wording:

This survey should only take 5 minutes and is completely anonymous. We would like to hear your views and appreciate and thank you for your time in completing it. We will share the survey findings and proposed next steps as soon as possible. If you have more than one child at the school, we would be grateful if you could complete a survey for each child.

Survey questions

1.   Which year is your child currently in?
[select from year options]
2.   What is your child's gender?
*   a.   Male*
*   b.   Female*
*   c.   Prefer not to say*
3.   Does your child have a mobile phone?
*   a.   Yes, they have a smartphone with a sim card / all functionality online / apps of choice*
*   b.   Yes, they have a smartphone without a sim card / limited functionality online / restricted apps*
*   c.   Yes, they have a non-smart / 'retro' phone*
*   d.   No, they do not have a phone*
*   e.   Other [free text box]*
4.   If your child does not have a mobile phone, are they asking you to get them one now or in the future?
*   a.   Yes, and I say that they can have one, but not until a specific year/age*
*   b.   Yes, and I say that they can have one, but I am not sure when they will be allowed one*
*   c.   No, they are not asking for one*
*   d.   Other [free text box]*
5.   If your child does not currently have a phone, when do you expect to get them one?

[select from year options / I don't know / Other – free text box]

6. Do you have a plan for how / when your child will own or use a smartphone?

- *a. Yes*
- *b. No*
- *c. I would like to make a plan but haven't done so yet*
- *d. I don't know*

7. If your child does own a smartphone, what are they using it for? Please select all that apply

- *a. For communication with home when walking to/from school*
- *b. To make calls*
- *c. To send text messages*
- *d. To take photos*
- *e. To browse online*
- *f. Social media apps*
- *g. Gaming apps*
- *h. I don't know*
- *i. They don't have a phone*
- *j. Other [free text box]*

8. Does your child use any of these social media apps? Please select all that apply

- *a. WhatsApp*
- *b. TikTok*
- *c. Snapchat*
- *d. Instagram*
- *e. Facebook*
- *f. Twitter*
- *g. Does not use any social media*
- *h. I don't know*
- *i. Other [free text box]*

9. If your child uses gaming apps, which ones do they use? Please select all that apply

- *a. Minecraft*
- *b. Roblox*
- *c. Fortnite*
- *d. Candy crush*
- *e. Does not use any gaming apps*
- *f. I don't know*

g.   Other [free text box]

10. Would you be interested in additional support for parents on this topic? For example, further workshops / shared learning for parents in school.

a.   Yes

b.   No

c.   Not sure

11. If yes, which topics would you be interested in? Please select all that apply

a.   Cyber security and safety

b.   Child development in relation to social media and phone usage

c.   How to teach and support children in using smartphones and social media in a positive way

d.   Yes but I'm not sure which topics

e.   Other [free text box]

12. Research has shown that children respond positively to smartphone restrictions if they know they are not in the minority and are therefore not 'missing out'. Societal pressure and anxiety is significantly reduced as a result, but this does rely on a wider community effort being made.

A recent example of this from a town in Ireland can be read about here: https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/jun/03/much-easier-to-say-no-irish-town-unites-in-smartphone-ban-for-young-children

Would you be supportive of a voluntary pact for parents to withhold smartphones from children – at home, in school, everywhere – until they are at least 14?

a.   Yes

b.   No

c.   Not sure – but interested to find out more

d.   I don't know

13. Do you have any thoughts or comments relating to children and mobile phone use, whether specific to your family, or generally? Please add your comments here.

(If you have other children at different schools, and it's relevant to your views or experiences with mobile phones, please state their gender and year group here as well.)

[free text comments box]

Message 3 – survey results and next steps (email)

Dear parents and carers,

Thank you!

A huge thanks to everyone who completed the survey. We had a great response, with X% of the school taking part (Y responses) and a [fairly even] split across each year group and gender – which helps give a good view of the school as a whole:

> *YEAR GROUP SPLIT PROVIDED*

What we're sharing today

After reviewing all of the survey data, we've extracted some headline results in this letter. The full survey results are included on subsequent pages, plus a summary of the themes emerging from the comments that were submitted.

In terms of the comments, the sheer volume (X in total, running to about Y pages of text), breadth and detail clearly illustrates how strongly parents/carers feel about this subject; ranging from being extremely concerned and supportive of taking action, to vehemently against the topic even being raised, with a range of views and observations in between.

As you will see from the results and commentary, there is no right or wrong here, nor a 'one size fits all' approach to this topic.

A reminder about why we're doing this

With this in mind, we'd like to reiterate that the survey's main objective was to start the conversation by gathering views across all year groups, and to be a first step in responding to existing parental concerns. We are very aware that owning and using a smartphone is an individual/family's decision and anything we propose going forward will be entirely voluntary.

However, while our children are at school together, we naturally form a community and do not live in isolation; our children will influence, and be influenced by, their peers. Smartphones are now a part of everyday life; we are not trying to deny this. Our hope is that we can act collectively, educate ourselves about the risks, and support each other in ensuring our children have a healthy relationship with phones.

It's also worth saying that this has been a completely 'parent-led' exercise and not driven by the school. Whilst we're sending communications via xxxx, this has only been as a mechanism to reach all parents/carers.

Survey headline results

•   X% said their children do not currently own a phone/smartphone: Of these Y children who do not yet own any type of phone, X% said they would not be getting one until secondary school, X% didn't know when they would be getting one, X% said they would get a phone in Year 6 and X% said in Year 5.

•   X% of respondents said they have a plan in place for how and when their child will use/own a smartphone; X% don't have a plan, and over X% said they would like to make a plan but hadn't done so yet.

•   Over X% of respondents said they would be interested in additional support for parents on this topic (such as further workshops/shared learning for parents in school).

•   In response to the idea of a voluntary pact between parents/carers to withhold smartphones from primary aged children, X% supported this idea (with a further X% saying they "weren't sure, but would be interested in finding out more").

Our ideas for next steps

Based on the survey results, we've come up with the following next steps:

1.   Education and support
Clearly there is interest and demand to learn more about how we can manage smartphone usage. We will therefore begin looking for an expert in this field to put on some workshops for parents/carers.

We would also like to explore how we can use the school as a hub for sharing knowledge on the subject, and help clarify the boundaries around what we teach our children at home and what the school's remit is (as part of the PSHE curriculum).

2. A voluntary pact: "to wait until they are at least 14 before giving them a smartphone"

The survey results indicate there is majority support for a parent-led voluntary pact between parents/carers to postpone giving smartphones to children until secondary school. We will share the pact and instructions for how to sign up to it in due course.

And in the meantime if you would like to get involved in some way or have any questions, please do get in touch:

- *Join the 'Name' WhatsApp Group using this link: [LINK]*
- *Or contact Names / numbers*

Best wishes,
Names

Message 4 – Intro to pact (email)

Parent-led Smartphone Free school pact

Background

In February 2024, a grassroots movement of parents sprung up in the UK called Smartphone Free Childhood. It triggered a national conversation about children and smartphones, and an open Smartphone Free Childhood WhatsApp group for our school was started which X parents/carers have since joined.

Technology presents many incredible benefits and opportunities, but how best do we navigate it at this critical stage of pre-teen development? We know this can be a controversial subject and there is no definitive answer – every parent wants to do what's best for their child. Ultimately, it remains a personal decision for each family and household. However, with new research showing a clear link between the age a child receives their first smartphone and mental health issues in young adulthood, we're keen to be proactive as a community and take steps to help protect and support our children while we still can.

In DATE we ran a survey for parents/carers to raise awareness of the issues and gauge wider opinion. Results of this (anonymous) survey are included with this letter – please do have a read. The results showed majority support among the school community for acting collectively to delay smartphones until children reach at least Year 7 (or beyond) of secondary school, minimising the risks from smart devices and social media.

Following on from the survey, we've now set up a pact for parents/carers and would welcome those at SCHOOL to get involved too! Having researched other similar initiatives in the UK and around the world (including the US campaign 'Wait Until 8th' grade), our pact aims to reset expectations amongst peer groups and empower parents to make informed decisions, giving them the collective confidence to delay giving children smartphones, knowing they are not alone.

Class reps will be sending a message out to parents/carers via class WhatsApp groups with a link to take the pact.

Thank you for reading!
From Names
ATTACHED: PDF SURVEY LETTER & RESULTS

Message 5 – pact launch (WhatsApp)

Message 1/2
Invitation to sign the School Smartphone Free Childhood pact

Following on from the parent-led smartphone survey results in DATE, we have now created a voluntary pact for those wishing to delay giving their child a smartphone. The aim is to empower parents/carers of both schools to unite and take collective action, based on the increasing evidence of the harm to young people from smartphones and social media.

You can make a pact to delay giving a smartphone to your child until they reach at least Year 7 (or beyond) of secondary school, with the reassurance that other parents in your child's year are doing the same.

If you would like to take the pact, please click here: [LINK]

Thank you!

Message 2/2
School Smartphone pact (continued)

Some links you may find helpful when thinking about the pact:

'Wait Until 8th' grade is a US pact which empowers parents nationwide to defer smartphones https://www.waituntil8th.org

A few relevant articles to read:
https://www.itv.com/news/2023-06-08/parents-in-irish-town-unite-to-say-no-to-their-children-having-smartphones

https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/jun/02/teacher-smartphone-children-mental-health-internet

https://sapienlabs.org/whats_new/study-out-from-sapien-labs-links-age-of-first-smartphone-to-mental-wellbeing/

Message 6 – Pact launch (WhatsApp)

Message 1/2
A new initiative set up by School parents launches today

Parents across SCHOOL have today joined together to make a pact to protect their children from the harms of smartphones and social media.

The voluntary pact means parents are agreeing to wait to give a smartphone to their child until they reach Year 7 (or beyond) of secondary school, knowing that other parents in their child's year are agreeing to do the same.

You can read all of the background and further information about this initiative in the letter sent via Parentmail on DATE.

If you would like to take the pact, please click here: [LINK]

Thank you!

Names

Pact Form

1. Acting in the best interests of my child and their community, I pledge to...

•Wait until my child is at least 14 before giving them a mobile with smartphone functionality

•Wait until 16 before allowing them access to social media

Tick this box to take pact [tick box]

2. Please enter your child's name (we need this to verify that you are a parent/carer of a child at one of our schools) [free text box]
3. Please tick your child's year group [select year group from options]
4. Please enter your name
5. Please enter your phone number – this will allow us to add you to the Smartphone pact WhatsApp Group for your child's year group, so that you can see who/how many others have taken the pact.

Yes we know...yet another WhatsApp group! But, having thought about and researched how other schools and communities are doing similar pacts, WhatsApp seems to be the best way of doing this for now. We do not intend these to be active chat groups, merely a mechanism to connect people.

If you would like to take the pact, but do not want to be added onto the WhatsApp group, simply don't enter your phone number here [free text box]
6. Thank you for taking the pact!
Please tick the box below to give consent for us to use the information you have submitted in this form solely for the purposes of coordinating the pact, keeping track of pact numbers and where appropriate adding to the pact WhatsApp groups. [Mandatory 'Yes I agree' tick box]

Let us know how you get on in your school.
community@smartphonefreechildhood.com