

The parent script

The kitchen-table conversation, in seven moments. Calm replies to the things children most often say. Twenty minutes once you have read it twice.

BEFORE YOU SIT DOWN

1. Read the script through twice before the conversation.
2. Agree the position with a partner first, if you have one.
3. Pick an evening when neither of you is tired or holding a phone.
4. Stop talking when they have heard you out. Twenty minutes is enough.

The seven moments

1. Pick the time. Tell them in advance.

Saturday or Sunday evening, after a meal, when neither of you is tired or holding a phone. Tell them earlier in the day that you want to talk. Use the word talk, not discuss. Twenty minutes is the right length.

“After we’ve eaten, can the three of us sit down for a bit? Half an hour. There’s something we want to talk about. Nothing’s wrong.”

2. Open with the decision, not the reasoning.

Lead with what you’ve decided. The reasoning comes later, in smaller pieces, over weeks. Adults respect being told a decision. Children do too.

“We’ve been thinking about phones, and we want to tell you what we’ve decided. We are not going to get you a smartphone yet. We are going to get you a phone with the things you actually need. Calls. Texts. A camera that takes basic photos. A torch. Music if you want it.”

3. Give the short version of why.

One sentence, calm, naming the thing. Do not lecture. Do not cite studies. Do not say all the science shows. Do not say when I was your age.

“What it isn’t going to have is Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, or a web browser. Not because we don’t trust you. Because the apps are designed to keep you on them, and we don’t want that for you yet.”

4. Tell them when you’ll look at this again.

Be specific. Nine months is better than when you’re older. Adolescents need a date on the calendar.

“When you’re older we’ll look at this again. Probably some time in year nine. We’ll talk again at Easter.”

5. Tell them they are not alone.

This is the single biggest moment in the conversation. Loneliness is the enemy. If you can name one or two other families doing the same, do it now.

“You are going to be one of the first in your class with a phone like this. Some of your friends will think it’s weird. Some of them, quietly, will be jealous. We’ve spoken to Tom’s mum and to Mia’s parents. They are doing the same thing in the next fortnight.”

6. Show them the phone.

Have the actual phone, charged, in a drawer in the kitchen. Bring it out at this point, not before. The physical handover changes the conversation. Put it down on the table between you. Don’t hand it over. Let them

reach.

“Here is the phone. Have a look at it. Tell us what you think.”

7. End the conversation cleanly.

Twenty minutes in, you’ve said what you came to say. Don’t over-explain. Don’t keep going. Stop. The conversation continues for weeks, but not in one sitting.

“That’s what we wanted to tell you. We love you. We’re not changing our minds on this. We are absolutely open to questions over the next few days.”

The school email

One short email to the head of year, sent in the August before September. Most UK schools reply the same day.

EMAIL TEMPLATE

Subject. Phone position, [child's name], Year 7.

To. Head of Year 7, copied to the form tutor.

Dear [head of year],

I hope you have had a good summer. I am writing about phones, briefly, before term starts.

We have decided that [child's name] will start Year 7 with a Nokia 3210, not a smartphone. They will have it on the journey home and at weekends. It does calls, texts and Snake, and that is about all. We are not asking the school to do anything differently. I just wanted you to know, in case it comes up in form time or in the WhatsApp groups.

If you would like to point us at anything that would help, or put us in touch with other families taking the same position, we would be very glad to hear from you.

With thanks for everything you do,

[your name]

WHAT SCHOOLS TEND TO WRITE BACK

Most heads of year reply the same day with some variant of thanks for the heads-up, we will keep an eye on form time. A small number ask if they can share the email, without your child's name, with the rest of the cohort. Say yes if you are happy with that: you have just helped two other families.

IF THE SCHOOL REQUIRES A SMARTPHONE-SHAPED DEVICE

A small number of UK secondary schools require apps that only run on a smartphone. In that case the email can end with: if a teacher introduces an app that genuinely requires [child's name] to use their own smartphone, please tell us, and we will find a way through. The honest options then are a refurbished iPhone SE with Apple Screen Time, or the Pinwheel Plus. The picker at knockphone.co.uk/which-phone walks the family through it.

The friend-network briefing

One paragraph for the parent WhatsApp group. The biggest single predictor of an easy first fortnight is whether one or two other families step out in the same window.

SEND THIS IN THE PARENT WHATSAPP GROUP

Quick one, on phones. We have decided [child's name] is going into Year 7 with a basic phone, not a smartphone. A Nokia 3210 in their pocket, calls and texts only, Snake on the journey home. We are not asking anyone else to make the same decision, and we are definitely not saying it is right for every family. I am sharing because there is a piece of well-meaning research that says it is much easier if a couple of friends do this in the same fortnight. If anyone else is leaning this way, we would love to know we are not the only ones. And if you have already given your child a smartphone, please do not read this as a critique: we would probably have made the same call a year ago. We are just trying to make this small thing slightly easier for our kid. Thanks all.

IF A FRIEND IS INTERESTED BUT WORRIED ABOUT THE SOCIAL SIDE

Send them this link: knockphone.co.uk/switching-kit. The whole kit lives there, free, no email required.

IF A FRIEND ALREADY HAS A SMARTPHONE AND FEELS JUDGED

Send them this line: we made the same call a year ago and do not regret a thing. There is a kit at knockphone.co.uk/switching-kit if you ever want to step back. No judgement.

WHERE THE REST OF IT LIVES

The eighteen common objections children make, with the calm reply, are on the same page as this kit. So are six common parent questions. The ranked list of UK simple phones is at knockphone.co.uk/best-simple-phones. The cheapest sensible UK SIMs are at knockphone.co.uk/best-sims. The ninety-second picker is at knockphone.co.uk/which-phone.