



# St Nicholas Diocesan School

A Co-Educational, Independent, Anglican, Day and Boarding School for pupils from Grade RR-12

Friday, 24 January 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians

We are well underway in 2020 with our children settling down nicely into their studies. Our first sports matches have been played and our extracurricular clubs are providing a creative outlet for the learners. I am always pleased to see so many learners trying new things and am also always concerned when I see some children glued to their phones in the afternoons when there is so much on offer for them to be doing. St Nicholas has a policy of allowing children to bring cell phones to school. We understand that they are a useful tool for arranging transport and keeping in touch with parents in the case of an emergency. Some teachers may even integrate cell phones into class activities but as a general rule your child does not need a cell phone at school.

Research shows that virtually all kids who are allowed to keep their cell phone in their room overnight will answer a late-night text, and most of them have spent at least some late nights sending texts. Only 11% of parents suspect their teens have ever sent, received or forwarded a sexual text or photo, while 41% of teens admit they've done so.

Half of all kids say they are addicted to their cell phones and worry that they use them too much. Their parents agree, and 36% of parents say they have daily arguments with their children about their phones. The problem isn't with kids today. In fact, the research shows that teens today are more responsible than my generation was in driving, drinking, sexuality and drug use. No, the problem is that smart phones pose new risks. Dr Laura Markham has this advice for parents.

## 1. Agree to rules, before that first cell phone.

Most parents think a "contract" with their child is unnecessary and silly. But a written agreement is a great way for your child to step into this new responsibility without you "over-parenting." When that cell phone comes with written rules and responsibilities in the form of a signed agreement, young people are more likely to learn how to handle them responsibly. If you ask your kids what they think the rules should be, and negotiate until you're happy, they will "own" those rules.

## 2. Use parental controls.

There are parental controls apps available for all phones, and iPhone have built-in parental controls that can be enabled.

## 3. Scaffold.

You know how when a building goes up, there's a framework around it? Once the building is complete, the scaffolding is unnecessary. Your job is to give your child support --like scaffolding -- as s/he learns each new skill.

So don't just buy a cell phone, give a lecture, and hope for the best. Instead, see this as a year-long project. If you see a mean text from one friend about another one, you'll have the perfect opportunity to ask him/her about social dynamics, listen to the dilemmas s/he's facing, and coach him/her about how to handle these challenges. Even once your kids have had a phone for a while, I recommend that parents reserve the right to spot check their messages and texts occasionally without warning. This gets kids in the habit of being responsible, because their phone use doesn't feel so "invisible."



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## 4. Talk, and listen.

At the dinner table, comment on news stories that involve cell phones, from sexting to dangerous apps to driving deaths. Ask questions about what your child thinks, and listen more. You might find, for instance that your teen thinks sending nude selfies via Snapchat is fine because the photo will self-destruct. But does your child realize that the receiver can take a screenshot? And does your child know that having a photo of a naked underage person on his cell phone is illegal, no matter how old he is?

## 5. Porn-Proof your child.

All kids will eventually see porn; it is just a question of when. But smart phones give children access to porn, so before you give your child a cell phone, you need to educate him/her about porn. Porn is almost always dehumanizing, because it depicts sex without warmth, intimacy or love. Most porn today also includes verbal and/or physical aggression toward women.

## 6. Know your child.

The research shows that when kids have problems with technology of any kind, it's because they're having problems that go beyond technology, and those problems will show up in the rest of their life. So if your child is mostly responsible, considerate and happy, he or she will probably be responsible with technology, too.

We need to accept that cell phones are part of our modern world and that we need to teach our children to use them responsibly. I encourage all parents to have those sometimes difficult conversations with their children earlier rather than later to ensure that a mistake today doesn't follow them on the internet for the rest of their lives.

Yours sincerely

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