



May 16, 2019

Dear Parents and Legal Guardians,

Over the past few years, the use of smartphones has grown exponentially. At the same time, there is a growing body of evidence to suggest caution when introducing these devices and associated applications to children.

Every family has their own values and circumstances that shape their approach to cellphone ownership and use. Given this growing trend and related research, Newton's Health and Human Services department would like to provide some guidance and resources around smartphones and mobile devices.

We suggest the following guidelines for the introduction and use of mobile devices.

Based upon a growing body of research, evidence, and discussion around the effects of smartphone use on youth,

- **Delay cell phone introduction**
 - Youth are encouraged to focus on face to face relationship building and active engagement with learning and play. And because mobile devices and the associated applications can become stressors when misused and/or overused, potentially leading to bullying, low self-esteem, privacy and safety issues or concerns, we discourage the introduction of smartphones at this developmental stage.
 - Consider holding off providing your child with any mobile devices as long as possible. We recommend 8th grade or later is more developmentally appropriate than earlier grades.
- **Start slow:** Consider utilizing a flip phone, "light" phone, or other device that has limited features and is primarily used for phone calls and text messages. It typically is not web-enabled and is not equipped with apps, games, or social media.
- **Establish a clear set of guidelines and use limits:** Regardless of what type of device you provide to your child, start the conversation about limits, including amount of use and time of day (i.e. limit or prohibit use at night). Many families choose to create "contracts" with their children to clarify expectations.
- **Utilize parental controls and monitor use:** There are many devices and apps that can help you to control access to both the Internet and specific apps. Maintain access and know passwords to all accounts.

You can find additional resources and guidance on the NPS webpage www.newton.k12.ma.us/smartphones including these suggested guidelines from Newton/Wellesley Hospital. We look forward to an ongoing dialogue with you as we work to ensure our children learn to use smartphones in healthy and responsible ways.

Sincerely,

Deborah Youngblood, PhD
Commissioner of Health and Human Services