

Dumb is the parent whose kid has a smartphone

Q Our 12-year-old has a smartphone. I know you don't approve, but all — and I do mean all — of his friends have them and texting is how they communicate. I don't think, under the circumstances, making him be the odd man out socially is a good idea. So our question: Do we have a right to monitor his phone communications? Some of the parents do, while others don't, feeling that doing so indicates a lack of trust. What do you think?

A What I think is parents who buy an expensive toy for a child primarily because all his friends have one have lost a firm grip on common sense. Toy? Yes, toy. Your

PARENTING



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smartphone is not a toy. But being that your son uses his phone primarily for entertainment, his cellphone, by definition, is a toy.

So what if a child's friends all have smartphones? Who, beyond the child in question, cares? Children, including those in high school, do not

need smartphones. They have them because they want them and have parents who, when faced with the choice between doing the sensible thing and what a child wants them to do, choose the latter.

You want your child or teen to have a means of contacting you in certain situations? Fine. I'm all for that.

Go to a big box store and buy him a flip phone, register it and put some minutes on it. Give it to said child or teen selectively, only on those occasions when you want him to be able to get in touch with you at a moment's notice and vice versa. Bada bing, bada boom! Have you ever tried texting on a flip phone?

As for the idea that a child without a smartphone will be, as you put it, the "odd man out," that's simply not true. Over the past five or so years, many parents have told me their kids don't and will not have smartphones. All the kids in question have friends and are socially active. They do not spend their weekends curled up in fetal positions sucking their thumbs. Social skills determine whether a child has friends, not a smartphone. And if you haven't noticed, where children and teens are concerned, social skills and smartphones are seemingly incompatible.

In fact, these devices do kids very little good and a lot

of bad. They become obsessions, addictions and impediments to proper socialization during the years that are critical to the formation of social skills. In addition, too many youngsters use their smartphones for inappropriate purposes. But you already know that, therefore, your question.

On that note: Yes, you have a right to monitor. You are the adults in this equation. You support him. In the final analysis, the phone is yours, not his. You are loaning it to him. He needs to be aware of that. But also allow me to point out that if a child knows his parents are going to check his texts and the numbers he has been calling, he is going to erase them or find a

way around their attempts to do so. Once one kid in a school figures out or learns how to neutralize parent monitoring, every kid in the school will have the information within a week.

For all of the above reasons, my question to you: What were/are you thinking?

Actually, I know what you were thinking. In effect, you were thinking that a 12-year-old knows what is in his best interest. Hello?

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