

Digital Education Agreements

Ages 12–14

The commitment we are making as a community stems from the need to provide deliberate guidance as young people fully enter the digital world, at a stage when the smartphone becomes central to their social and daily lives. As adults, we aim to strike the right balance between young people's natural desire for independence and the importance of our presence to offer guidance and supervision.

This Agreement has five purposes:

- to define the age and conditions for smartphone access
- to manage social media and digital communication
- to establish clear and agreed rules
- to strengthen the educational role of adults
- to accompany young people on their path towards full autonomy

We undertake to:

- 1. WAITING UNTIL THEY ARE AT LEAST 13 YEARS OLD BEFORE GIVING OUR CHILDREN A SMARTPHONE.** In the meantime, we can arrange for them to use a shared family device.
- 2. WAITING UNTIL THEY ARE AT LEAST 14 YEARS OLD BEFORE ALLOWING THEM INDEPENDENT ACCESS TO SOCIAL MEDIA,** in accordance with current legislation in Italy. Access to social media should be introduced through a guided phase with initial supervision on our part.
- 3. ENSURE THAT ACCESS TO DIGITAL DEVICES IS INTRODUCED GRADUALLY,** with agreed rules and in controlled settings (shared areas of the home). The aim is not to leave children to manage things on their own at the start and to allow time for them to build the necessary skills before granting full autonomy.
- 4. CREATING SMARTPHONE-FREE SPACES AND TIMES WITHIN THE FAMILY:** at the table, during homework, in the evening/before sleep, in bedrooms, during family and social occasions, and on some outings with friends or during shared activities.
- 5. ALWAYS PRIORITISE FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION AT HOME OVER THE USE OF DEVICES.** In general, limiting the use of messaging apps. Using class group chats for school purposes only, avoiding distractions or conflicts.
- 6. SETTING CLEAR RULES AND SHARING THEM WITHIN THE FAMILY,** with children and among parents. It is important to agree on such rules even in cases of parental separation.
- 7. MAINTAINING AN ACTIVE EDUCATIONAL ROLE,** with the aim of guiding our children's digital education ourselves rather than delegating it to others.
- 8. KEEPING DEVICES ACCESSIBLE TO US UNTIL AGE 16,** by sharing passwords. Finding a balance between the need for oversight and the building of a climate of trust.
- 9. ACQUIRING THE RIGHT EDUCATIONAL AND DIGITAL COMPETENCIES,** and helping young people develop them too, through appropriate training pathways.
- 10. OFFERING ALTERNATIVES TO ONLINE ACTIVITY:** social occasions, interesting activities, screen-free experiences. Ensuring that digital technology does not become the only social space and the main source of stimulation for young people.

FURTHER READING

So are you advising me to give my child a personal phone at the end of Year 8?

Not necessarily: it is perfectly fine to wait longer — in fact, there are many benefits to doing so! However, it is worth not underestimating the risk that children may feel isolated if most of their classmates already have one. Fortunately, there are several strategies for protecting children when the decision is made to hand over a personal smartphone.

How long does the “guidance period” last, and how does it work?

It is a period during which the smartphone is used together, to ensure that the basic rules for correct use have been learned (set out in the “Agreement”, see point 5 above).

It can last three, six months, or even longer: it depends on the child’s age and maturity. How to go about it?

For example, at first the smartphone is always used together, for a maximum of half an hour a day; then, gradually, moments of independent use and moments of shared use alternate, until fully autonomous use is reached within agreed hours and rules. The parent must always be able to access the smartphone whenever they deem it appropriate.

Why does my child have to wait until age 14 to use WhatsApp, social networks, and generative AI on their own?

It is a legal requirement since 2018, following the European Privacy Regulation. It applies to WhatsApp and all social networks. With Law 132 of 2025, this requirement was extended to generative AI chatbots as well. Some may consider this excessive, but there are many serious reasons to respect it, not only from a legal standpoint but also in terms of the psychological wellbeing of minors (the Italian Society of Paediatrics recommends waiting until age 13!

<https://sip.it/2025/12/02/bambini-troppo-digitali-troppo-presto-ogni-ora-di-schermo-e-un-rischio-per-corpo-e-mente/>). Please note: the law refers to independent use (opening personal accounts) by minors: use together with parents, with their explicit consent or under their close supervision, is therefore permitted before the age of 14.

So do I have to “spy” on my child? What about their right to privacy?

Respecting children’s privacy is important, but it comes after the legal and educational duty of supervision and protection. In the specific case of internet access, complete privacy cannot exist: online, one can be the perpetrator or victim of serious offences. For this reason, parents have a legal duty of supervision, particularly until the child turns 14 — an age up to which parents are 100% legally responsible for their child’s conduct.

Note: avoid “secret snooping” if at all possible. It is better to make clear from the outset that periodic checks are a condition for being allowed to use the smartphone. Clear agreements and honesty are a way to maintain open dialogue and promote children’s sense of responsibility.

No phone in the bedroom at night? My child insists they only use it as an alarm clock.

True: a phone works perfectly well as an alarm clock. But keeping it in the bedroom at night carries serious risks, both for health and for digital safety. Even when switched off, the temptation to turn it on during certain periods can be overwhelming. Moreover, the most problematic uses by minors tend to occur precisely at night. Better to accept it and buy a proper alarm clock!

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Marco Fasoli, Il benessere digitale, il Mulino, 2019.

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TWO IMPORTANT WEBSITES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Digital Agreements Foundation website: www.pattidigitali.it

Italian Society of Paediatrics website: www.sip.it