

FIRST PHONE LICENSE

Parents plan for 12 Phones arrive at 11

THE PREPARATION GAP

Ten studies.* 41,912 participants. One message for the holidays: a first phone works best as a milestone that families prepare for.

68%
of parents say a child should be at least 12 before getting a smartphone.

60%
of parents of 11 and 12 year olds say their child already has one.

19%
of parents say they enforce their screen rules consistently.

* A synthesis of ten studies and registries, prepared by First Phone License. Source list on page 6.

KEY FINDINGS

AT A GLANCE

Each study answers one question. Read together, ten studies across national surveys, randomized trials and a five-year cohort point the same way: families plan for a first phone, and the day it arrives makes those plans hard to keep. This report puts the evidence side by side, so families can act on the whole picture.

01 **Parents plan for 12. Phones arrive at 11.**
Ownership climbs from 29% to 60% between ages 8 to 10 and 11 to 12.

02 **Nearly every family has rules. Few can keep them.**
86% have rules and 19% enforce them consistently.

03 **A gift changes what a phone means.**
Limits can feel personal when the phone arrives as property.

04 **Practice changes habits. Paper agreements leave them where they were.**
Scenario practice improved behavior. A written media plan and a safety lesson did not.

05 **Age is a weak guide to readiness.**
Digital maturity predicts healthier phone use after accounting for age.

06 **Families are organizing around readiness.**
The Wait Until 8th pledge now covers more than 155,000 families.

10
studies and nationally representative surveys

41,912
surveyed parents, children, teens and young adults

155,000+
families in the Wait Until 8th pledge registry (a count of families, not study participants)

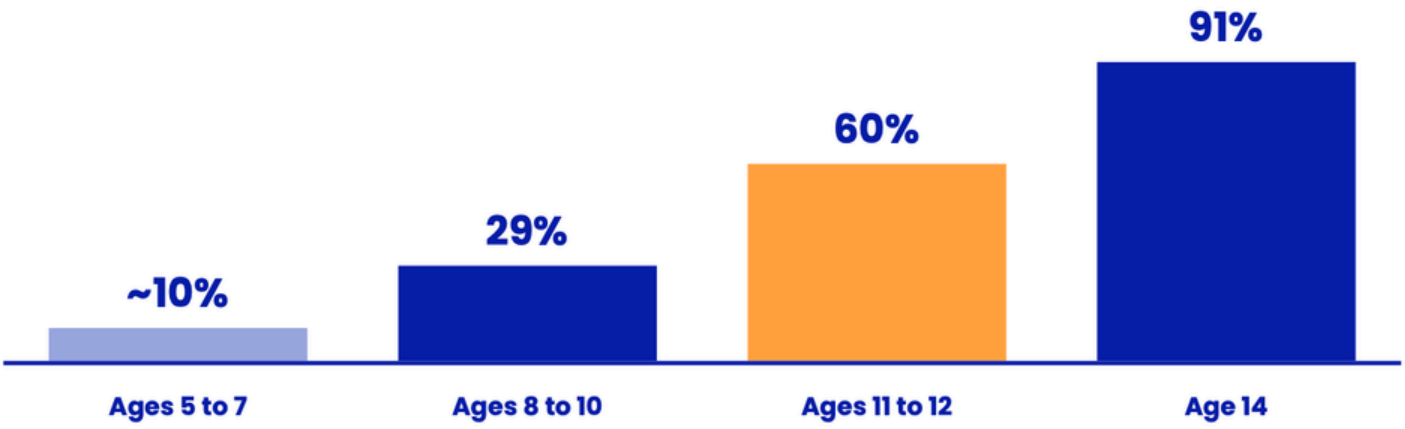
WHAT'S BEHIND 41,912

What it is	The combined number of participants across ten studies: nationally representative surveys, randomized trials and a five-year cohort study that followed children after they got a phone.
What it means	The pattern is not one survey's result. It shows up with parents, kids, teens and young adults, from national polls to a 32-country study.
Why it matters	When different methods point the same way, the pattern is hard to dismiss. It gives families a sturdier basis for deciding when and how to hand over a phone.

FINDING 01

Parents plan for 12. Phones arrive at 11.

68% of parents say a child should be at least 12 before owning a smartphone. Ownership reaches 60% among 11 and 12 year olds. By age 14 it reaches 91%.



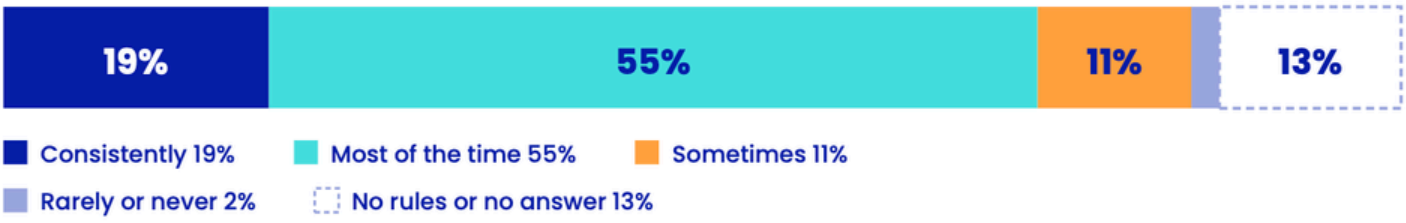
Share of children with a personal smartphone, by age. Sources: Pew Research Center (2025); Common Sense Media Census (age 14).

Lower-income families report earlier ownership for children 12 and under: 31%, against 20% in middle-income and 16% in upper-income homes. One phone often covers school, safety and entertainment.

FINDING 02

Nearly every family has rules. Few can keep them.

86% of parents with children 12 and under have household screen rules. 19% enforce them consistently. Most land on “most of the time,” a realistic place for adults with full days.



Rule enforcement among parents of children 12 and under. Shares are out of all parents, so the four enforcement groups total 87%; the remaining 13% report no household screen rules or did not answer. Source: Pew Research Center (2025).

FINDING 03

A gift changes what a phone means.

A phone that arrives wrapped reads as personal property to a child. Later limits can feel like a claim on something that is already theirs. The surveys do not test gifting directly, and the pattern across them points to it.

1

A gift arrives
The phone is unwrapped as personal property.

2

Rules stay broad
86% of families have screen rules.

3

Enforcement tires
19% enforce them consistently.

4

Arguments grow
38% of parents and teens argue regularly. 10% say constantly.

Sources: Pew Research Center (2024, 2025). Step 1 describes a pattern, and steps 2 to 4 report survey results.

FINDING 04

Practice changes habits. Paper agreements leave them where they were.

Written agreements and classroom lessons are common first steps. In three trials, only hands-on practice changed what children did online.

INTERACTIVE SCENARIO PRACTICE · DESIMPELAERE ET AL., 2020

N = 580

Improved.

Children disclosed less data on a realistic commercial website.

Written family media plan (Moreno et al., 2021)

N = 3,040

No change. Written plan did not improve adherence to household media rules.

Classroom safety curriculum (Jones et al., 2024)

N = 1,072

No change. Knowledge and confidence rose, but privacy habits and help-seeking held steady.

Cards show whether behavior changed, not study size. N = participants in each study.

FINDING 05

Age is a weak guide to readiness.

Studies seem to disagree on whether the age of a first phone matters. Together they point to skills, self-regulation and family support. Two identical 13-year-olds can be worlds apart.

STANFORD MEDICINE

No significant link

Five-year study of children who got phones at about age 11.8 found no link to depression symptoms, sleep or grades.

N = 263

SAPIEN LABS

Earlier phone, lower well-being

Young adults in 32 countries. A younger age at first smartphone or tablet is associated with lower adult well-being scores.

N = 27,969

DIGITAL MATURITY INVENTORY

Maturity beats age

Adolescents 12 to 18 with higher digital maturity show healthier phone use and better well-being, after accounting for age.

N = 890

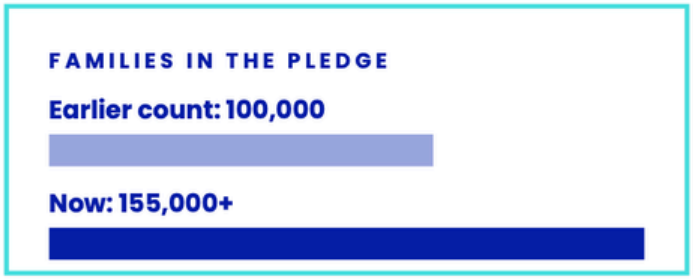
Sources: Sun et al., Child Development (2023); Sapien Labs Global Mind Project (2023); Laaber et al. (2023). N = participants in each study.

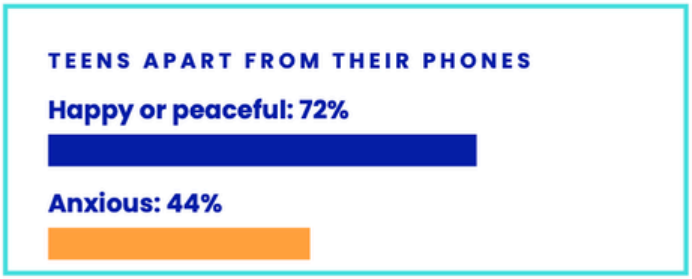
> **A phone isn't earned by age. It's earned by readiness.**

FINDING 06

Families are organizing around readiness.

The Wait Until 8th pledge grew from 100,000 to more than 155,000 families. Neighbors agree on timing together, which lifts peer pressure from any one household. 72% of teens report feeling happy or peaceful when apart from their phones, and 44% report anxiety.





Sources: Wait Until 8th registry (2026); Pew Research Center (2024).

WHAT FAMILIES CAN DO

A PATH THAT WORKS

Driver's ed shows the way. Nobody hands a 16-year-old car keys and hopes. Phones deserve the same structure: study, practice with a trusted adult, then show readiness.

AGES 0 TO 10

Delay and foundation

Shared devices in common rooms protect sleep and play.

AGES 10 TO 12

Shared utility

A basic phone or watch with no open app store works as a household tool.

AGES 12 TO 14

Practice together

Trusted adults and kids rehearse real situations, like an unkind group chat.

AGES 14 TO 16+

Supported autonomy

Access grows as maturity shows. Phones charge outside bedrooms.

Four steps for this season

1. Introduce the phone as a household tool with a first job.
2. Practice one scenario together before the first unlock.
3. Agree on a calm response before anything goes wrong.
4. Coordinate timing with other families you know.

> Already gave a phone? These steps work at any point. A graduated path can start the day you choose.

ABOUT FIRST PHONE LICENSE

First Phone License is the world's first progressive unlocking smartphone education app. Kids earn smartphone access by showing they're ready, and parents learn alongside them. The Learner's Permit web course for ages 9–12 launches November 16, 2026.

firstphonelicense.com · press@firstphonelicense.com · Press Contact: Amy Blankson

Sources: Pew Research Center (2024, 2025). Sapien Labs Global Mind Project (2023). Common Sense Media Census, Sun et al., Child Development (2023); Laaber et al. (2023); Desimpelaere et al. (2020); Jones et al. (2024); Moreno et al., JAMA Pediatrics (2021); NYT Wirecutter reader survey; Wait Until 8th registry (2026).