

A smartphone contract for teenagers

By T. Lee Brown
Correspondent

Thirteen-year-old Chase Frankl of Sisters signed a contract before his parents got him a smartphone. Item number 1 deals with the sense of entitlement kids often develop, believing that constant access to technology is a requirement their parents must fulfill.

Other items help the family navigate responsibilities such as chores and homework. An evening shutdown time keeps the phone from affecting Chase's sleep.

Tech-induced lack of sleep is a big health problem among teens in America.

Contracts establish solid guidelines. From there, it's up to parents to do follow through on consequences. Guidelines help Chase keep a reasonable view of his own phone use.

"Sometimes if I think my parents are being unfair," Chase says, "I can just read over the contract and it's in there."

The Frankls offered to share their contract with the community in case it might prove useful to other families. It has been lightly edited for publication.

Contract – Terms of Use – Cell Phone

This is not my phone. It is a device purchased, as part of a plan, which is owned and paid for by my parents. Above all else, I understand, use of this device is a privilege and not a right.

I only get to use this device once my chores and homework are complete. Any neglect (or negative attitude) toward said chores, will result in loss of phone privilege the following day. Continued chore neglect will result in increased confiscation periods up to and including full loss.

Parents agree to pay majority of phone costs/fees as long as I remain a full-time student in good standing. In addition, I will receive an increase to my allowance. \$5 of this increase will go toward plan payment of phone.

There will be no zeros/below-C grades (including class grades) or GPA less than 2.5 for the duration of phone usage.

Behavior will be that of a gentleman at all times in school. Any negative teacher comments on attitude and/or disrespectfulness and/or effort level will result in phone consequences.

I will extend such "gentleman-like conduct" to my phone etiquette and/or text messaging (or any such electronic communication) at all times. I will not hide behind messaging/texting to bully or be disrespectful to anyone at any time. Above all else, I will not message/text something I would not say to someone's face. Result of a violation will result in a minimum one week confiscation of device. Continued violation will result in increased confiscation periods up to and including full loss.

I will not use my phone in class... ever, at family mealtimes, or whenever my parents deem usage would be inappropriate or antisocial.

I will not give my phone number/contact information to anyone I wouldn't feel comfortable inviting into my home. This is a safety issue.

My parents can see everything I do on my device through parental control options. They receive notifications on any violations I conduct. Confiscation duration will be determined by my parents.

I will not ignore my parents' call or texts if/when I can reasonably respond/reply. Continued pattern of lack of responsiveness will be evaluated by my parents to determine confiscation duration.

Any loss/damage to my device is not covered. I understand, not only the importance of how I use the device, but also the physical control of it. If I lose it or damage it, my device is gone and will not be replaced until I can afford my own phone.

I will not use my phone after 9 p.m. unless otherwise approved by parents. No later than 9 p.m., I will return my phone to its charging station in my parents' bedroom. Any violation will result in loss of phone privilege the following day. Continued violations will result in increased confiscation periods up to and including full loss.

Over time, if I have no violations in any of the above items, my parents may decide to add more applications or time extensions past 9 p.m. to my privilege to use this device that is owned by my parents.

Mom _____ Dad _____
Teen _____

What's your family's tech style? Email t@kidmadecamp.com with your story. Suggestions, questions, and feedback are also welcome.

PARENTING: Managing digital use is important to many families

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suggests that increased screen time (on the part of parents and/or children) may be contributing to kids' developmental problems, lack of empathy, attention-deficit disorders, anxiety, and depression.

Says Jillian, "You always hear from parents, 'They wouldn't know what to do without their phones,' but you'd be amazed ... just how quickly they adjust and really thrive at not having that screen in front of them."

The Frankls considered getting Chase a flip phone.

"Ironically, the flip phone was harder to lock down than the smartphone," says Paul. "The iPhone has better parental controls on it."

Chase says his friends sometimes laugh at him when those controls limit his phone use.

"Nothing that big," he shrugs. "Some of my friends don't even have phones. We usually jump on a trampoline or go down to the creek or just do something fun."

Solo time offline is important, too. Studies show that time alone in a natural environment can bring great rewards.

"It's a cool feeling," Chase says. "You can just be out there, and think about whatever you want... It's nice to have downtime without anyone watching you or texting you. You can just be alone and do whatever you want."

That kind of independence is one goal of the Frankls' parenting style.

"A bit more old-fashioned type parents is what we want

to be," says Paul.

Reading about technology, which he uses frequently for his job, got Paul concerned.

"The addiction, the phone, the way it pings, the way it traps their minds at a younger age, has the same effect narcotics have on adult brains," he says. "That feeling doesn't actually create happiness; it creates that you want happiness. But you don't necessarily find happiness in the phone."

Paul was disturbed to learn "how smart the engineers are, where they actually design the phones to be addictive. The whole scrolling in Facebook is a method to addict you. Even when [Facebook-Instagram] sends you Likes, it's not in realtime."

Likes and other notifications show up based on when Facebook-Instagram's algorithms predict the user will be most likely to get sucked into the app.

"It seems a bit — I don't know if evil is the right word, but they know it's manipulating the mind," says Paul.

The contract and ongoing discussions with his parents give Chase a thoughtful perspective. What advice would he offer to others about their phones?

"I guess just, be on it less," he says. "When you don't need to be on it, be out in the world. It's about making memories and experiences in real life."

In the long run, he observes, "Nothing you do now on the phone is really going to matter."

As part of our ongoing series about kids, technology, and nature, The Nugget sat down with The Frankl family for an interview. How does your family handle tech? Email t@kidmadecamp.com.

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