

These Are the Safest Phones for Kids, According to Experts

From the best phones for young kids to the best prepaid phones for teens, here are the safest options to buy for your child when they're ready for their very own device.

By **Maressa Brown**

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LOL Surprise! dolls and Nintendo Switch gaming consoles might be among the most popular gifts for some children this year, but others are asking for something a bit more grown-up: a phone.

Over half of kids—53 percent—now own a smartphone by the time they're 11, according to a recent, nationally representative survey from

Common Sense Media. And 84 percent of teens now have their own phones, as well. Given stats like those, it's no wonder kids as young as elementary school age will put them at the top of their wish lists. Of course this leaves parents grappling with many reservations and questions.

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"Today's parents are both blessed and cursed by technology options made available to their children," says Titania Jordan, chief parenting officer of parental-control app Bark. "While the ability to locate and communicate with your child in real time is incredible, the ability of others to do so can be frightening and dangerous."

Luckily, there's a slew of kid-friendly phone options now that can keep certain concerns and risks at bay. When going about picking one, start first by deciding what features they need and what they don't. Here are a few key questions Jordan encourages parents to ask themselves before they buy:

- Do you want your child to have access to the internet?
- Is location-tracking an important feature their device should have?
- Do you want your child to be able to download apps?
- Do you want to limit who your child can communicate with (and when)?
- Are you concerned about limiting screen time?
- Do you want to be able to text and email your child or will speakerphone suffice?
- Do you want your child to be able to take photos, videos, watch shows, and listen to music?
- Do you want to be able to monitor your child's digital communications for dangers?

Once you've decided on features, consider this expert-curated round up of best and safest phones for kids your ultimate buying guide based on your

child's age and needs.

Best Phones for Young Kids

When it comes to a child who is 9 or under, Common Sense Media suggests parents look for phones with very simple controls, big buttons, and extremely limited features. You'll also want to go with a phone that can only make calls to a short list of contacts and that have no games, no web access, and no camera. They like the Sprint WeGo.

If you don't want to get your child a smartphone or even flip phone, you could go with the Verizon Gizmo Watch, which is popular among parents of younger children as it has parental list of approved contacts, and kids can't lose it as easily because it straps to their wrist, Jordan says. Plus, it's waterproof, up to 10 trusted contacts for two-way voice calls and messaging, and has a GPS locator (although consumers say the GPS is a bit delayed, Jordan points out).

The Gizmo is also psychologist-approved. "I find when kids do get a smartphone, it leads to more family conflict and less face to face social interaction and sometimes even negatively impacts grades and sleep," says Sarah Berger, Ph.D., a psychologist in Chevy Chase, Maryland. "The Gizmo allows the kids to have more independence, to text with a few people, there is a GPS in it—so it allows for a taste of a phone without actually giving a phone."

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Best Emergency Phones

Running on the Android operating system, Palm Phone is a smaller phone (the size of a credit card) that's perfect for kids, Jordan says. And there's a lot more to love about it than the fact that it's water-resistant and uses Gorilla Glass, which is designed to be thin, light, and damage-resistant. "It

also includes location tracking and intuitive parental control options," Jordan explains. "The Palm is a more portable phone that's designed to be less distracting—another plus for younger users."

Another to consider, according to Tim Uittenbroek, founder of VPNMash, a company dedicated to online privacy education: Alcatel Go Flip, which comes with simple utility apps, a 2MP camera, and big and clear keys. "Its mobile virtual network operator Ting, with its monthly \$6 line fee, allows your child to use in case of emergencies in pick up and drop off at school or after-school programs," Uittenbroek says.

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Best Budget-Friendly Phone

Gabb Wireless is another option that looks like a smartphone, so it has that "cool factor," according to Jordan, but it's cheap. (It's on sale for the holidays for \$69.99, marked down from \$99.99.) Note that, for better or worse, it lacks a browser and app access. "Additional features that are currently missing and frequently requested by parents: location tracking, music apps, and the ability for parental monitoring solutions to monitor texts," she says.

Best Flip Phones

Yes, believe it or not, flip phones didn't go the way of bleached tips or Britney Spears and Justin Timberlake's relationship. They still exist as we head into 2020.

Jordan notes, "Consumer Cellular Doro is the preferred flip phone among our parenting community with no browser—which is hard to find, as most flips actually have a browser." But there's a downside for going lower tech: "You cannot monitor text messages nor track their location via GPS," Jordan says.

TracPhones / Alcatel prepaid phones are another option in this category. "These are available at every grocery store and pharmacy and are \$19.99," she says. "But in the end, most parents find that dumbing down a smartphone is the most preferred route to take."

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Best Phones for Kids Overall

Jordan says that parents simply looking for the best overall option for their child's first phone would do well to go with an Android. "They are the safest bet," she says. "They play well with third-party apps and provide more monitoring coverage for YouTube, Snapchat, and Instagram. While iPhones are popular, when it comes to helping keep your child safe online, Androids provide the better user experience and more comprehensive coverage for parents."

Check out the Samsung Galaxy, which has a large 5.5-inch display and an impressive battery, according to Bark. The Galaxy J7 is also compatible with Samsung's kid-friendly digital ecosystem Kids Mode, and parental controls can be enabled through Google's Family Link.

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There's also the Google Pixel 3a phone could be a great first smartphone for a big kid. Given its the constant software updates, the phone could even last them throughout high school. Google's Digital Wellbeing features are available on the phone, as is Family Link.

That said, if you want to go with an iPhone, the latest iOS (13.3) added the ability to limit your child's calls to contacts or emergency list only, Jordan says. "So you can legit track your child's location via find my iPhone, and they can only receive/make calls from/to mom and dad, if that's your thing," she notes.

Reuben Yonatan, founder and CEO of GetVoIP, believes the parental controls on iPhones are excellent. "You can lock it down to the bare essentials if you want," Yonatan notes. "You can easily track your kids. iMessage is great because it works even without a data plan. Plus, they often have a decent hard drive capacity for music, which is great for keeping them distracted."

If you're looking to save, go with an older model. Yonatan says, "When paired with a decent case, they can be quite indestructible—something that is essential when kids are involved."

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