

QUESTIONS TO ASK #3

CELL PHONES IN SCHOOLS: WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW

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Smartphones are everywhere, including in our schools. But mounting research shows they're doing more harm than good in the classroom. According to psychologist Jonathan Haidt and digital wellness expert Catherine Price of [The Anxious Generation](#), smartphones are undermining students' focus, mental health, sleep, and social development. Even just having a phone *in sight* reduces working memory and attention.

Teachers report that phones are one of the biggest barriers to learning. Instead of focusing on math or reading, students are scrolling TikTok, texting in class, or feeling pressure to respond instantly to social drama. Meanwhile, anxiety and depression rates have skyrocketed, especially among teens. The evidence is clear: kids do better, academically, emotionally, and socially, when schools limit cell phone use.

Some school districts have started to act. Others have not. Parents have the power to push for real change, and it starts with asking the right questions.

What Parents Should Know

- **Smartphones disrupt learning.** Studies show that even “off-but-visible” phones lower test performance and reduce attention.
- **Phones fuel distraction, anxiety, and drama.** Group chats, social media, and apps follow students into class, recess, and even the bathroom.
- **Mental health matters.** The rise in teen anxiety and depression tracks closely with the rise in smartphone access and social media use, especially among girls.
- **Teachers are overwhelmed.** Many report they spend time each class managing phone use or battling constant interruptions.
- **Students want boundaries.** Research shows many kids feel addicted to their phones and wish adults would help them set limits.

Red Flags to Watch For

- Your child's school allows unrestricted cell phone use throughout the day—even during class.
 - Students are expected to use their own devices for instruction, with no clear limits or monitoring.
 - Teachers are left to make their own rules, leading to inconsistency and confusion.
 - Discipline policies don't address phone misuse.
 - Your child's phone is interfering with sleep, focus, or friendships—and school isn't helping reinforce healthy habits.
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Questions to Ask Your School Board

- Does our district have a cell phone policy?
 - If yes, what exactly does the cell phone policy say?
 - How is the policy enforced, and what happens if students don't follow it?
 - Have we considered phone-free school days or secure phone lockers?
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Questions to Ask Your Child's Teacher

- What are the rules about phones in your classroom?
 - Do students ever use phones or devices during lessons?
 - How do you handle phone distractions during class?
 - Do you see phones interfering with learning or social dynamics?
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Questions to Ask Your Child

- How often are you on your phone during the school day?
- Do you feel like your phone makes it harder to focus or pay attention in class?
- Have you ever felt anxious about something happening in a group chat or on social media while at school?
- Would it be easier to concentrate if phones weren't allowed at all?

What Parents Can Do

- **Support a strong policy.** Advocate for a district-wide rule that keeps phones out of the classroom during the entire school day—including lunch and hallway transitions.
- **Talk to your child.** Explain that phone limits aren't punishment—they're protection. Help them understand the *why* behind the rules.
- **Set boundaries at home.** Reinforce screen-free times (like homework, meals, and bedtime) to help build better habits.
- **Push for enforcement.** A policy is only as good as its follow-through. Ask your principal how it's being enforced—and if it's not, why not.
- **Build a coalition.** If your school doesn't yet have a strong policy, talk to other parents, gather data, and bring a proposal to your school board. WILL's model policy is a great place to start.

Phones don't belong in kids' hands during the school day. The evidence is overwhelming: when schools set firm, consistent boundaries around phone use, kids are calmer, classrooms are more focused, and learning improves. Parents have the power to demand change *and* to model it at home. Don't wait to see the negative effects. Speak up, stay involved, and protect your child's learning and well-being.

Learn More

- WILL [Model School Board Policy](#) on Cell Phones in the Classroom
- The Anxious Generation [Resource Library](#)
- [Jonathan Haidt](#) Substack
- [Catherine Price](#) Substack
- Daniel Buck on [How To Ban Phones Effectively](#)

WILL is a legal resource for parents, students, and school districts. If you believe your rights have been violated, you can contact us at www.will-law.org/contact-a-lawyer. Depending on your situation, we may be able to help further.

This document is part of the WILL Parental Rights Toolkit. Explore the full toolkit at: www.will-law.org/parenttoolkit