

HOLD *the* PHONE

Excessive mobile use is a common source of angst between teens and their parents. In her new book, clinical psychologist Dr Sarah Hughes says there are right — and wrong — ways to go about setting limits

OVER the course of her teenage years, your daughter will spend an astonishing amount of time attached to her smartphone. With so many apps at her fingertips — Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and WhatsApp, just to name a few — chances are her phone will get more attention than her homework, and she'll spend more time engaged in electronic exchanges with friends than face-to-face interactions with family.

As a parent, you'll think her phone use is excessive and unreasonable, and you'll struggle to understand why she finds it so challenging to tear her eyes away from a pocket-sized screen long enough to have a conversation with the people around her.

Her phone-induced deafness will test your patience, as will the 50 or so texts she sends each day, and the excess usage charges that sneak their way onto your phone bill each month, despite the numerous conversations you've had with her about her data limit.

It's healthy and normal for your teen to want to use her phone to connect with friends, but she also needs to learn to balance her need to connect with digital-free downtime. You can force her to correct her balance by taking away her phone, but it's a short-term fix and one that won't help her learn the skills she needs to moderate her own phone use longer-term.

What your teen really needs is help to learn the skills to self-monitor. Teaching skills for self-monitoring is more work up-front, but it's also a more permanent solution.

MANAGING YOUR DAUGHTER'S PHONE USAGE

I'VE lost count of the number of times phone use has come up as an issue in my sessions.

If there's a teen in the vicinity, phone use seems to be an issue.

"She's on her phone all the time, it's infuriating" is a phrase I hear most days. "Nothing we've tried works" is another.

And when it comes to discouraging excessive phone usage, nine times out of 10 the issue is this: parents are trying to convince their teens to spend less time



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on their phones by presenting them with information about the harmful effects of too much screen time. For the record, it never works.

You might be concerned about the impact of phone use on your daughter's sleep and concentration, but she couldn't care less. Her phone makes her happy in the here and now and that's all she really cares about.

That she'll be tired tomorrow or that her productivity might be affected isn't cause for concern — missing out on a group chat, though, that would be a crisis, so putting down her phone is out of the question.

Debating your daughter's phone use will get you nowhere fast. You'll never be able to make sense of her need to be constantly connected, and she'll never understand why you're so uptight about her being on her phone,



THE IMPORTANT BITS

YOUR daughter's phone is an important part of her social world in a way that your phone likely isn't for you.

A "because I said so" approach to parenting, which you might have used in the past, isn't likely to be effective in helping you change your daughter's phone usage, and persisting with this approach could also drive a wedge between you.

DO set limits for her phone use, but change your process.

DON'T dictate phone rules.

DO negotiate and come to mutually agreeable limits for her phone use.

NEGOTIATION will increase the likelihood of your daughter sticking to your agreement. And because it shows her you respect her and are willing to listen to her concerns, odds are it will improve the quality of your relationship as well.

Phone fury: Teens won't tolerate you arguing your phone use is OK but theirs is not important; and (left) clinical psychologist Dr Sarah Hughes.

NEGOTIATING LIMITS

THE phone limits you negotiate with your teen will differ depending on her age and her specific problem areas, but a few examples are listed for you below. Remember, collaborating with your teen is key, so avoid starting a conversation about phone limits with rigid rules already cemented in your mind.

I AGREE to hand in my phone between the hours of 9.30pm and 7.30am.

I AGREE to only use my phone between 7pm and 7.45pm after homework is done.

I AGREE to put my phone on aeroplane mode during homework time.

I AGREE to have 45 minutes of phone-free time each afternoon.

I AGREE to put my phone down when family members are talking to me.

I AGREE and acknowledge that if I'm not able to stick to these limits, my parents will need to add further restrictions to help me have better phone boundaries.

Your daughter won't like handing in her phone because she'll worry about you reading her private messages. Avoid the blow-ups by letting her add a passcode to her phone before handing it in.

Once you've established mutually agreeable phone limits, then set a time — ideally within a fortnight — to discuss how well the new boundaries have worked.

when — from her point of view — you're on your phone nearly as much as she is.

Just a quick side note on this, because it's an issue that comes up a lot when you lecture your teen about her phone use, be prepared for

the fact that you're leaving yourself wide open to questions from her about your phone usage.

If you regularly answer calls, respond to texts or check emails on your phone at home, she may query why it's OK for you to check your phone so frequently when it's not OK for her. Think before you react to this. You'll feel

compelled to argue that your phone use is irrelevant and none of her business, or to differentiate your phone use from hers on the basis that your usage is work related, but neither argument will get you very far.

Double standards will always be a sore point with your teen, and your insinuation that her phone use is unimportant will only add more fuel to the fire. It might not be your usual approach, but acknowledging your daughter's feedback and admitting you need to have better boundaries with your phone too will be a more effective strategy.

Admitting your faults might feel uncomfortable, but it'll help you to be effective.

If you persist with your double standards, you'll lose her respect and end up on opposite sides of the problem. Think about how you'd feel if your boss continually gave you a hard time about not putting in enough hours, but left at 4.30pm each day to play golf. How much respect would you have for him and how willing would you be to comply with his requests?

Don't be afraid to acknowledge when your teen is right; she'll respect you for it.

When it comes to your daughter's phone use, the two of you will never see eye-to-eye. You can persist with longwinded lectures and present her with information about the dangers

of overuse, but neither strategy will get you very far. As backwards as it sounds, the best thing you can do is agree to disagree. Accept that her phone is important to her for reasons you'll

never understand, and instead of setting rigid rules that discount this, work with her to reach a mutually agreeable solution.

Negotiating with your teen might feel uncomfortable at first, especially if you're used to ruling with an iron fist, but don't let that get in the way of you giving it a go.

If you want your daughter to be more flexible and less argumentative, you're going to need to lead by example, and negotiation is the key to getting

things back on track. In her teenage

years, negotiation will be one of the most powerful parenting strategies you have at your disposal — use it.

EDITED EXTRACT FROM SKIP THE DRAMA, SARAH HUGHES, AVAILABLE FROM EXISLEUBLISHING.COM AND GOOD BOOK STORES, RRP \$30

MONITORING APPS

If you're sceptical about your teen's ability to accurately monitor her phone use over your agreed trial period, phone monitoring apps are a good way to ensure a more objective measure of usage.

DR SARAH HUGHES COMPLETED HER CLINICAL TRAINING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY AND HOLDS A DOCTORATE IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY AND PhD IN CHILD AND ADOLESCENT ANXIETY DISORDERS. THE FOUNDER OF THINK CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGISTS, SHE HAS 10 YEARS OF CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

