

# A key question for modern parents

## What age is appropriate for the first mobile phone?

As I was watching my son warm up with his teammates at a fourth-grade basketball tournament, one of the other parents leaned over and asked me at what age we planned on giving him a mobile phone.

My initial thought was, “I don’t know, a long time from now!” When I said I wasn’t sure, the parent informed me that they decided 12 was the magic age for their kids. As I thought about this, I couldn’t help but think that I was 18 and in college before I had my first mobile phone. Do 12-year-olds really have mobile phones? When I asked that very question, I quickly found out that several of the 10-year-olds currently playing basketball already had mobile phones.

Does a 10-year-old need a mobile phone? A 12-year-old? At what age is a phone necessary for our kids? Truthfully, I don’t know. Owning a mobile phone is a big responsibility.

You need to decide what age is right for your kids based on their maturity and need. If your child is responsible and involved in activities that frequently take them away from parents, such as sports, then maybe life would be easier for everyone if they had a phone. The decision shouldn’t be treated as simply giving them another toy or gadget, though. A



mobile phone provides a child access to the world, and they need to understand that it is a privilege, not a right. I believe it should be considered a rite of passage much like getting a driver’s license.

We have found a middle ground we can live with for now. We gave our son a GizmoPal when he was 8. The GizmoPal is a wearable mobile phone that can only send and receive calls from a few select

contacts that I designate. This allows my son to call me when he needs to, and I can reach him when he is away from me. This might be when he’s playing at the city park, when he might be getting home late from a ball game, or when he is in a crowded store. The GizmoPal doesn’t allow apps; it’s simply for calling or for the child’s caretaker to track them to a location. Through the GizmoPal app, I can see exactly where he is on a map on my smartphone.

Ultimately, as a parent, the choice is yours. What is right for your family may not be right for mine. I still haven’t decided a “magic” age for my sons. Only time will tell when I cave in to the pressure of a mobile phone. My hope is that I can delay that day as long as possible. I plan on sticking to the simple GizmoPal for my sons for the foreseeable future. ☑

### ONLINE RESOURCES

For more information on this topic, go to [www.commonsemmedia.org](http://www.commonsemmedia.org) and look under Parent Concerns. They have a whole section dedicated to cellphone parenting.



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### Parenting Tip

If you think your child is old enough to need a cellphone, the **GizmoPal by LG** may be the place to start. Wearable as a watch, the phone allows your child to call parents and allows parents to see where they are. GizmoPals are available at Amazon, Verizon and Best Buy starting at \$75 plus subscription.