

"This came after some questionable text messages that I saw on their phones with some friends," Drysdale said. "And so they knew that this was coming. I told them, 'Having a phone is a privilege,' and they were abusing the privilege."

Magrini also mentioned that parental control apps are helpful for parents who can't watch their children all day.

"Say you're a working parent and your child has access to an iPad or an iPhone after school, it's very difficult to supervise," Magrini said. "There are different apps where you can, from a distance, control what it is, how much and all of those things. I think it's important to employ as well when you don't have direct sight of what they're doing."

## Terms and conditions

Salkoff's teenage and adult children's first phones were old-school flip phones, but he still approached the initial purchase as though he were entering into a contract with his kids—in fact, he printed out a "phone contract" that he found online for them all to sign.

"We made it pretty clear like, 'This is a phone that we are giving to you,'" Salkoff said. "'It's our phone and we have the right to look at it, and we will control when you have it.' That kind of thing."

Having ground rules in place for when phones and screens are appropriate is something all three parents agree on. Designated areas or times when phones aren't allowed sets clear boundaries to mindless viewing and instills a family culture that screens aren't always necessary for communication.

"Like not having phones in the room at night was a thing, you know, because it kind of disrupts their sleep, which is definitely true if they're on their phone late at night," Salkoff said. "So, what we tried to do is have a place in the kitchen or in a common area that had the chargers ... because we would sit down to dinner without them."

"Our kind of family rule is, 'work first, play later,'" said Drysdale. "On a Saturday morning, they get all their chores done early and clean their room, then I don't really care what they do. It's instilling the philosophy of, you know, playing is fine. If it's playing outside or playing on your phone, it's fine as long as your work and your responsibilities are met first."

To Magrini, framing screen time as a reward instead of a default means paying attention to what your children like, and when they're doing what they're supposed to be doing.

"I think trying to find out other things that your child is passionate about and use those as

reward," said Magrini. "The reward system never fails, you know, from toddler to teenage. They evolve from sticker charts maybe to some other sort of rewards type system. Just redirecting what you use as a reward and either have that be screen time or not have that be screen time."

Regardless of what works best for your family, the goal is to be consistent with the boundaries of when screens are and aren't OK. When your children get older, you can decide as a family which restrictions make the most sense. However, with screens increasingly taking up space in homes and in school, it's important to not over-police your children—for both your sakes.

"Hopefully you're giving them skills that they can navigate their real life as they get older," Salkoff said. "It's important to just be focused on what the end game is. If you try to police everything your kids do, you're going to drive yourself crazy probably in the end. You're not going to necessarily give them the tools."

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Jonathan Salkoff, Reno Dads Blog contributor



Jonathan Salkoff

Magrini agreed that it's important to not view every minute of screen time as a parental failure.

"It takes effort," Magrini said. "And that's hard because sometimes you're just exhausted. ... As parents, we tend to be very hard on ourselves about everything. ... You can't beat yourself up because I am certain that 30 years ago there was something else that parents were beating themselves up about, you know, they were using to distract their children, and there will just be another thing in 30 years that parents are beating themselves up about that they're using to distract their children."



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