

To give or not to give your child a phone?

With technology being a big influence in instilling virtues and even vices in children, it calls for a different approach in parenting. What do experts say? **By TRACY GESARE**



Roselyn Kigen - Life Coach, Marriage and Family Therapist

Up until the age of 13, children need intensive parental guidance before they reach the age where they get assimilated to external influence from peers.

Society will always have an agenda for children. Parents should not let that overpower the agenda they have for their children and be intentional at protecting them. A parent's absence cannot be justified. Sacrifices have to be made for them to be intentionally present in their children's lives. This does not mean that one becomes a helicopter parent but intentional parenting and presence makes a lot of difference in the children's growth.

For emotional growth, children need a lot of love, understanding, affirmation and a listening ear. When a child has been hurt, they need to have a safe space to go to first. If they do not find it then they try to solve it by themselves as they see it being done by adults around them or those that are exposed to them by television.

When children are devoid of something they need to develop to their optimum, they can result to filling that void to something that works for them, temporarily. Unfortunately, in such a peer-led situation it is a "monkey see, monkey do" situation where children resort to

doing things how they see others do.

Social media, for example, has been used a lot as a tool of attacking others. Even politicians do it. And when the teens see 'respected' members of the community use it like that, they will too. What is the perfect age?

There is no right age for children to own gadgets even for entertainment. Parents should purposefully delay buying their children gadgets until it is absolutely necessary.

There are several programmes that can be introduced to occupy their spare time like reading, playing musical instruments and nurturing any of their extra-curricular interests. Children imitate better than they listen and parents are their first role models. If parents introduce anything to them they should get into that program too.

As they come of age, it is vital to wean them slowly into social media. Prepare them for some of the dangers that come with it like cyber-bullying and teach them the simple essentials you might know like ignoring pop-ups which often lead to lewd content.

In cases where a child has already gone wayward, it is best that the child gets help before disciplining. Some flare-ups are a cry for help which should be used as a teachable moment. The parents or any other adult involved in solving the matter should go down to the child's level and speak with them, with the intention of listening.

It truly does take a village to bring up a child. It is advisable that a child has good relationships with other people close to the parent so that they can have someone to talk to if they feel like they cannot talk to the parent, first.

Bullying is rampant in schools. The first step is that parents need to take the relationships with their children seriously and make them intentional. Above all, parents should learn to communicate with their children effectively. Above all, there is no perfect parent but parents have to try and be very intentional with their parenting.



What the parents say...

A FOUL MOUTHED KID ONLINE IS ALSO FOUL MOUTHED OFFLINE

Becky Bochaberi, mother of two aged 14 and 10
 Allowing the older child to at least have a social media account of his own was something I was hesitant about for a while. I thought he was too young for it. But once he showed he could make responsible decisions on his own, I let him have an account he can use in moderation. He was 12 then.

I give him a little privacy so that he can express himself freely with his peers. I try to

parent with love and teach him to be responsible online because the internet never forgets; something I constantly remind him.

As parents we don't know what networks the children could be on behind our backs, what they are saying about others or themselves.

Kids can surprise you sometimes by saying nasty things on the internet but truth is, that has to be a child that says those nasty things offline, in person, to other children.

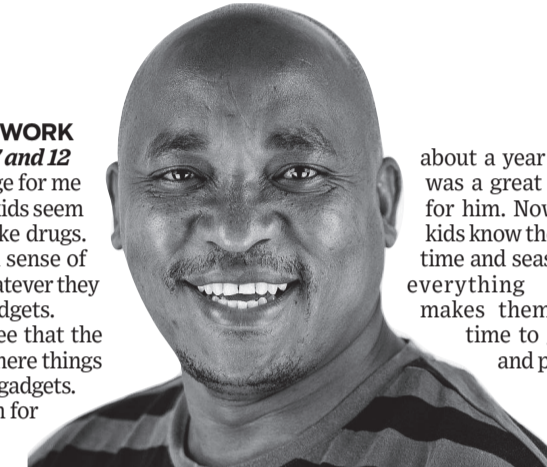
I know one formula doesn't fit all but parenting with patience, not being hard on each other or the children is a good place to start. With the digital age, we just have to have room for trial and error and growth. It is new to all of us including adults. With every new challenge approach it that way and make them learn from their slip-up and keep moving. Grace will always be sufficient to let a child start over when they mess up.



I TEACH THEM THE VALUE OF WORK

Tonnie Mello, father of two aged 7 and 12
 Gadgets remain the biggest challenge for me raising children in the digital age. The kids seem to get addicted to them so fast. It is like drugs. With this, children also tend to lose a sense of responsibility as they rush to finish whatever they have so that they can make time for gadgets.

To the best of my ability, I try to see that the screen-time is minimal and in cases where things become unmanageable, I withdraw the gadgets. I denied my older child the PlayStation for



about a year which was a great lesson for him. Now both kids know there is a time and season for everything which makes them have time to go out and play.

Besides playing, I expose my children to what I do for a living for them to understand how income is generated and understand the value of work. The lifestyles we lead are supported by resources such as money and I think occupying their minds with hands on activities makes them better people. Over and above that, there is a value and process of building the discipline and skill to become a productive human being which is also a process I like for them to understand and incorporate the use of technology.

THERE IS ALWAYS ONE PARENT AT HOME WITH THE KIDS

Penny and Abraham Mbane, parents of four aged 21, 18, 15 and 8

Saying that you will keep track of what the children are watching while they are on social media is a slippery slope, since we cannot monitor 100 per cent of what they are exposed to.

Also, you can't control the kind of content they

share once they sign up on social apps. This means you have to make them understand that as much as they want to look cool, the internet never forgets.

In our house, we have rules on when, where and how to use the electronics. If they happen

to break any of them, we take away the devices. One thing that has helped with the regulation is the presence of a parent at home. We have scheduled our work



hours in a way that there will always be someone at home when they are not in school.

We also try and spend quality time with our children. It could be an hour or two over the weekend or go on a holiday as a family to bond and create stronger relationships with them. Even with that, we still have to be on the same page on decisions made. We don't play good cop bad cop or counter each other's decisions with the kids. That way kids know what is said is final and they can't always get their way.

We have created structure which enables the children to be occupied with activities to a point that they don't have time to be on electronics. Some of the activities we involve the kids in include tuition classes, piano, sports, dance, family dinners and church activities that way, they have minimal time to be on gadgets.