



Dear Parents, Carers and Families,

We all want Sheffield children and young people to grow up happy, healthy, confident and ready for the future.

Childhood is a time for developing independence, building friendships, exploring the world around us and learning how to manage challenges. As technology becomes an increasingly important part of everyday life, many families are asking how we can help children benefit from technology while also protecting the things that matter most about growing up.

That is why Sheffield City Council is working with schools and families across the city to support families to **delay smartphone ownership and encourage a healthier balance with screens and technology.**

We know this is not always easy. Many parents say they would prefer to wait before giving their child a smartphone, but worry that their child will feel left out if their friends have one. By working together as a community, we can make it easier for families to make choices that support children's wellbeing.

Why does this matter?

Smartphones can be useful tools, but introducing them too early can be harmful. Research shows that early smartphone use can contribute to:

- reduced sleep
- difficulty concentrating
- increased pressure, anxiety and worries linked to online interactions
- exposure to inappropriate or harmful content
- online bullying and friendship issues that follow children home
- less time spent playing, socialising face-to-face and developing real-world confidence

Schools across Sheffield are increasingly seeing issues that begin online and then affect children's lives in school, including conflicts in group chats, pressures linked to social media and children staying up late using devices.

What schools are doing

From September 2026, all schools in Sheffield will be smartphone-free, in line with updated government guidance.

This means smartphones should not be used during the school day, including lessons, breaks and lunchtimes. Schools will communicate their own policies with families, which may include smartphones being kept out of sight, not allowed on site, or stored securely.

There is no requirement for any child to have a smartphone for learning. Schools will make appropriate arrangements for children who need a device for medical or other exceptional reasons.

What families can do

We encourage families to consider these actions:

- **Wait until at least age 14 before giving a child a smartphone.**
- Choose a simple “brick phone” if your child needs to call or text while travelling independently.
- Ease the peer pressure by joining with other parents through the Smartphone Free Childhood Parent Pact: www.smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk
- Delay social media until at least 16, in line with the ban on social media for under 16s that will be rolled out in Spring 2027.
- Spend time online together. A shared device in a communal space can give older children more independence.
- [Lead by example with your own phone use](#)

For families whose children already have smartphones, small changes can still make a big difference. These might include:

- using and frequently reviewing parental controls and privacy settings
- keeping smartphones out of bedrooms
- creating regular phone-free family time, such as during meals
- talking openly about online safety and children’s experiences online
- modelling healthy technology habits as adults

Working together for Sheffield children

By working together across Sheffield, families, schools and communities can make it easier for children to enjoy more of what helps them thrive: play, strong friendships, healthy sleep, better concentration, curiosity, and real-world independence.

Thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely,

Sheffield City Council - Education, Children and Families Policy Committee

Where can I get further information

The following organisations provide useful guidance and research:

- [NSPCC Keeping children safe online](#) | NSPCC
- Smartphone Free Childhood has published a range of resources, guides and tools for both parents and carers and for school staff:
 - Resources for parents: <https://www.smartphonefreechildhood.org/resources-for-parents>
 - Resources for teachers: <https://www.smartphonefreechildhood.org/resources-for-teachers>
- House of Commons Committee Report [Screen time: impacts on education and wellbeing](#) – Education Committee
- Children's Commissioner Guide for parents and carers on managing children's digital lives: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/what-i-wish-my-parents-or-carers-knew-a-guide-for-parents-and-carers-on-managing-childrens-digital-lives/>
- Best Start in Life screen time guidance for under 5s: <https://beststartinlife.gov.uk/screen-time-under-5s/>