

Original article

[http://www.strugglingteens.com/artman/publish/CellPhoneRulesEI\\_130211\\_.shtml](http://www.strugglingteens.com/artman/publish/CellPhoneRulesEI_130211_.shtml)

Extended Insights

CELL PHONE RULES FROM PARENT TO CHILD

Cell Phone Rules from Parent to Child - Extended Insights

Feb 11, 2013, 05:28

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Greg Hoffman is a very lucky 13-year-old. But not because he got the brand -spanking-new latest iPhone from his parents this Christmas that he really, really wanted. Young Greg is lucky because his mom, Janell Hoffman, a Cape Cod-area blogger and mom to five cared enough to provide him with a set of rules in the form of a contract that he was asked to sign before she activated his new phone.

Given the "hot button" parent-child issues relating to cell phone use and abuse that I've encountered of late in my education consulting and case management practice, I've taken the liberty of expanding upon Ms Hoffman's original rules. My hope is that by so doing, more parents may be empowered by the spirit, not just the process of her actions.

### **Our Rules for your new Cell Phone:**

(designed for use with pre-teens or teens whether "young" in age, stage, or both!)

1. It is actually *our* phone, not yours. We bought it. We pay for its usage plan. Consider it on loan to you. If you incur any unexpected charges on it, we will help you out... *the first time*, assuming it was a genuine error. After that, you will reimburse us for any extra costs you incur.
2. Until you can pay for your own phone costs, we must know your passwords for the phone and any social media you have on it. Assume that from time to time, we may check. Not always or even often – we are busy people. But if we are concerned about something, absolutely more than at other times. We also set the phone rules and will confiscate your phone if you break them.
3. Just like your curfew and your allowance increased with age, your phone rules should be upgraded or expanded as you get older and your needs change. Just not right now. But be assured that it will not matter now or later, whether your friends have a better agreement or an easier time with their phone use from their folks, so please don't tell us how it works for them. While we wish them well, we are not their parents so it's irrelevant to us.
4. If your phone rings, you must answer it. Say hello and goodbye; use your manners. If you are

not in a position to answer and talk briefly, it should be off and accepting messages. Set up your voice mail today and learn how it works. We expect you to check and respond to messages (whether from us or anyone else) regularly and promptly.

5. One of the main reasons you gave us for "needing" this phone was so we could reach each other easily. That means you do not avoid our calls. Not ever. If the screen flashes with our names, we expect you to answer. Text messaging is something we may or may not choose to use to communicate with you. It doesn't replace talking or voice mail however.

6. In turn, we promise to give you the same respect. We will answer whenever we see you trying to contact us, though we may not always be available for lengthy discussions at that particular moment. If our phones are off, we're likely doing something else pretty important. That's what the voice mail is for (see #4 above).

7. Another reason you gave for "needing" this phone was in case of emergencies. So on a similar note, never run your battery down so low that the phone couldn't be used if there was a genuine emergency. Things that run the battery down most usually involve downloading data, playing games etc. Limit these activities so the phone remains important safety device. You really never do know when you will need it. This would also be the time to remind you that a phone doesn't need to be charged to dial 9-1-1. It always works and this is good to know. However, 9-1-1 won't be helpful in most of your "emergencies" over the next few years. But we will be.

8. If you do message us, or text your adult relatives, teachers, coaches, future employers etc., use proper spelling, punctuation and capitalization if you want to be taken seriously. Don't use excessive abbreviations just to sound cool - these folks aren't impressed by that, just annoyed. If you text us in coded gibberish or with too many abbreviations, expect us to answer something like this: ??? Then we will wait for your clear message instead.

9. You will hand the phone over to us promptly on every school night and every weekend night (unless you are still out). It will then be left to charge overnight (not in your room) and returned to you the following morning. There is no need to make or receive calls or send texts in the middle of the night. If it's too late or too early to call someone using a land line phone, you should not be calling their cell or texting either. You don't need your phone for music to fall asleep, or for its alarm to wake you up either. You can listen to your personalized playlists on an iPod, or an ancient device called a "radio". Similarly, you can wake up using "clock radio" or an even older device, an "alarm clock".

10. The phone does not need to go into classes with you at this stage of your education unless your teacher requests it for a special project. It stays in your locker or it stays at home. If we discover that you are using it during school hours, it will just stay home. This we WILL check. Have conversations face to face with friends instead of texting. Use your agenda, not your phone to record your homework. Take notes from the blackboard onto paper or a laptop, rather than taking pics of notes on your phone that you will not be able to read clearly later, or won't bother to write out. Tell time from your watch. If you need the internet, use a computer at school, not your phone connection. These are all important life skills to learn now.

11. If it falls into the toilet, smashes on the ground, vanishes into thin air or anything else, you are responsible to us for replacement costs or repairs. Same goes for accessories including chargers. Only after the debt is cleared will we discuss a replacement. (But first, take a moment to learn how immersing your soggy phone in uncooked rice in a zip lock plastic bag can sometimes bring drowned phones back to life. Now THAT is something you can Google!)

12. Do not use your phone, or any technology, to lie, fool, humiliate, bully or deceive another human being. Ever. Remove yourself from any exchanges that turn hurtful to others. And though we hope you can muster the courage to stand up for the underdog, if you struggle with this at times as we all do, at least learn to stay out of the crossfire.

13. In general, do not text, email, attach, forward or say anything through this device you would not say, share with or show to us or your grandparents without any embarrassment.

14. That leads nicely into our next rule: no cruising porn on the phone. The same rules apply for information searching on the phone as on our home computers: the web is for finding information you can openly share. If you have questions about more personal or controversial issues, ask someone whose opinion and experience you trust - hopefully your parents, older cousins etc. but not Yahoo or Google.

15. In public, the phone gets turned off, put on silent, or tucked away. That rule goes double for restaurants, movies and live theatre, and especially while conversing face to face with others. We will work on doing the same thing. Feel free to (politely) remind us if we get carried away and forget our own rule – phones can be addictive sometimes even for us! We are not otherwise rude or inconsiderate people; having phones with us should never change our true personalities.

16. Do not send, save or forward naked or partly naked pictures of yourself or of anyone else. (See "grandparent" rule above.) Smarter and more mature people who should know better have fallen into this trap. It is *always* a bad idea, and a little bad luck in this regard can ruin someone's life regardless of their age or status. Cyberspace is vast, unregulated and more powerful than any of us, and it is downright impossible to make anything disappear once it's "out there". Especially a bad reputation, regardless of whether it is deserved.

17. Don't take a zillion pictures and videos with the new phone (see "don't run down the battery" rule above), and if you overdo it sometimes, don't immediately upload the lot without editing onto Instagram, Snapchat or whatever is currently "in". No-one really wants to see every moment of your life documented. Live your life experiences in person rather than capturing every moment digitally. That way, they can remain stored in your memory for eternity.

18. Leave your phone at home sometimes (on purpose!), and allow yourself to feel safe and secure in that decision. It is not alive, nor is it an extension of you. You will not shrivel up without it by your side. In fact, you can manage quite well without it. Learn that sooner, not later. Be bigger and more powerful than the destructive FOMO (fear of missing out) problem so many people have today. And while you're at it, make time to consider, debate or just wonder about the marvels and mysteries of the world around you, without googling the answer first.

19. Do download music that is new, classic, world beats or just plain different from the exact songs your peers are listening to right now. Technology gives you access to music like never before in history. Take advantage of that gift. Expand your horizons. Tip: music for today's most popular video games and many of superhero movies is actually written for full orchestral scores, and often classically based. If you don't think classical music is your thing, start listening to video game and action movie soundtracks. You might be surprised!

20. It's fine to play games on your phone sometimes –just not always video games. Try word games, puzzles or brain teasers. Challenge friends and relatives to join you. These games are surprisingly addictive in a good way, and often more fun than what your friends are playing.

21. *Never* text or surf as you walk. Ever. It's a good way to trip over curbs, walk into poles, get hit by a car or side-swiped by a bike, or even get your phone snatched. Keep your eyes up and shoulders high instead. Observe the world around you and keep safe. And when you start to drive, same rule – *NEVER text and drive*. Even if it's not illegal where we live at the time.

22. If you need to leave your phone turned on for long periods, don't carry it too close to your body. Don't jam your cell into a pants pocket (front or back). For girls, never tuck your cell phone into your bra. Get a backpack, messenger bag or purse - and stash the phone there. The health risks from long-term exposure to cell phone emissions especially for young people are not yet fully understood but we know enough to be concerned - don't take unnecessary chances now with your future health.

23. Expect that you will mess up these rules sometimes. When that happens, we *will* take away your phone for a while, but likely not forever. We know you might get angry or upset, but when you calm down, we will sit down and talk about it. And eventually we will start the whole thing over again. As family members, we must keep communication open and learn from each other. Remember that we are actually on the same team, even though it may not always seem that way.

24. Know that you have awesome parents who have not only generously loaned this phone to you, but care enough to also give you a long list of rules to go with it and who trust you to keep your word in a signed contract. And know that we've done so because you are an awesome kid and we trust you to be responsible. Enjoy the new phone!

Love,  
The Folks