The
Intentional Tech Coalition
CONCORD
Connected by Choice

Comparing Kids' Watches, Phones, and Parental Controls

Many families want a way to stay in touch without handing over a full smartphone. This guide compares popular options side by side, from simplest to most capable, so you can choose what fits your child and your family. Every watch and mobile phone here needs a cellular plan for calls, texts, and location.

Smartwatches for kids

Calls, texts, and location on the wrist, with no open internet or social media. Listed from simplest to most features. Age ranges are from Turning Life On; match to maturity, not age.

Watch	Contacts and features	Location	During school
Gabb Watch 3e Simplest first device *Ages 10–12*	Calls and texts with parent-approved contacts only. No browser, app store, or social media.	Real-time GPS and Safe Zone alerts.	Parent-set Quiet (Focus) Times in the MyGabb app.
Garmin Bounce 2 Activity focus *Ages 10–12*	Calls and messages with parent-approved contacts. Step and activity tracking.	Real-time GPS and safe-boundary alerts.	School mode limits messaging and alerts during class.
TickTalk 5 Most communication *Ages 10–12*	Voice and video calls, texts, and group chats with approved contacts. Unknown callers blocked. Camera and music streaming.	GPS with route history, including indoors.	School Mode pauses calls and extras except SOS.
Bark Watch Built-in monitoring *Ages 10–12*	Calls and texts with parent-managed contacts. Bark scans texts, photos, and videos for concerns. SOS button.	Real-time GPS and geofence alerts.	School Mode schedules.
Apple Watch SE Apple families *Ages 13+*	Set up through Family Setup from a parent's iPhone. Child doesn't need an iPhone. Contacts limited to an approved list.	Location through Apple's Find My.	Schooltime limits the watch to a simple clock face.

Questions to ask before you buy

What do we need it for?
Walking home, practice pickups, reaching a parent? Choose the simplest device that does that job.

What extras come with it?
Cameras, video calls, music, and AI features add appeal, and add more to manage.

How will it work at school?
Check your school's device policy and whether the device has a school mode.

What's the full cost?
Add the device, the monthly plan, and any monitoring subscription.

Start with a home phone

Any age

If your child mainly needs to reach you from the house, a home phone may be all you need. Options include a **traditional landline**; **Ooma Telo**, which runs on your home internet, so it goes down when the internet does; and **Tin Can**, a phone built for kids whose free tier only calls other Tin Can phones.

Phones, from simplest to most capable

Simpler phones remove distractions by design but often can't share location. Kid-focused smartphones add parent tools. Age ranges from Turning Life On appear under each name.

Phone	Internet and apps	Parent tools	Location for parents
BASIC AND FLIP PHONES			
Nokia 2780 Flip *Ages 10–14*	Small built-in browser and app store (KaiOS).	No parent dashboard or remote controls.	Can't share location with a parent.
Sunbeam F1 Horizon *Ages 10–14*	No browser or social media. Feature level chosen at purchase.	No remote parent portal.	Can't share live location.
Light Phone III *Ages 12+*	No browser, social media, or email, by design.	Password-protected online dashboard controls which tools get added.	Can't share live location.
Kyocera DuraXV Extreme+ Rugged flip *Ages 10–14*	Browser and data can be turned off.	PIN-locked Device Control limits contacts and blocks apps.	No real-time sharing to a parent app.
KID-FOCUSED SMARTPHONES			
Be cautious. Guardrails on these phones can leak more than the marketing suggests, and monitoring tools alert you after the fact rather than block.			
Gabb Phone 4 Pro *Ages 10–16*	No browser, social media, or public app store.	Parent app. Flags and blocks explicit images and links in texts.	Real-time location and Safe Zones.
Pinwheel *Ages 10–16*	No browser by default (parents can add one). Curated app library. Built-in AI chatbot.	Parents can read texts, even deleted ones. Contact safelist and schedules.	GPS location and arrival alerts.
Bark Phone *Ages 10–16*	Can start as talk and text only, then open up gradually.	Alerts for bullying, self-harm, and explicit content.	Location, geofences, and check-ins.
FULL SMARTPHONES			
Be cautious. Kids often find and share workarounds to built-in parental controls, and there is no research-backed age at which a full smartphone is recommended.			
Galaxy Z Flip, Motorola Razr Foldable smartphones *No research-backed age*	Full internet and app stores. They look like flip phones but aren't.	Google Family Link: app approval, time limits, site filters.	Live location through Family Link.

Parental control apps and resources on next page →

Parental control apps

Start with the free tools already built in: **Apple Screen Time** on iPhone and **Google Family Link** on Android. Paid apps add more.

App	What it does best	Devices
Bark	Scans texts and 30+ apps for bullying, self-harm, and predators. Alerts parents to concerns instead of showing everything.	iPhone and Android. Browser extension for laptops.
Qustodio	Screen-time limits, app and web filtering, and usage reports.	Strongest on Android. iPhone monitoring is more limited. Windows and Mac.
OurPact	Instant app blocking and schedules. Optional periodic screenshots.	iPhone and Android only. No laptop app.
Aura	Web filtering and internet pausing, plus identity-theft and dark-web monitoring.	iPhone, Android, Windows, and Mac.
Net Nanny	Web filtering and screen-time limits.	Its support pages list Android, Chromebook, and Kindle Fire as not currently supported.

Helpful resources

Scan a code with your phone's camera to learn more.

Smartphone Free Childhood

A parent movement to delay smartphones and social media, with a phone-alternatives quiz and guides for talking with kids and other parents.

smartphonefreechildhood.org

Tech-Wise Arlington

A Massachusetts parent guide to home phones, watches, and basic phones, with costs, drawbacks, and a simplest-first ladder.

techwisearlington.org/smartphone-alternatives

Let's keep the conversation going!

The **Intentional Tech Coalition** helps Concord families make thoughtful technology choices at home and at school. **Learn more:** intentionaltechcoalition.org

Features and plans change often, so check each company's site before buying. Information as of October 2026. Listing a product is not an endorsement. Age ranges are from Turning Life On (turninglifeon.org). Match to your child's maturity, not age; there is no research-backed "safe age" for a smartphone.

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