

I was always the parent who claimed that we would be steadfast in the movement of “Wait Until 8th” in regards to getting our daughter a cell phone. Then Covid hit when she was in middle school, and we saw our only child feeling isolated, and lonely, and we caved. There were some positives to her having a cell phone in terms of connectivity to her peers, which truly did help her emotionally during a very rough time. Snap Chat was the app of choice for her and her friends, and honestly, I felt grateful for the “thing” that was making her feel like a happy tween.

Of course Covid came and went, but the cell phone habits were rooted deeply, and inextricably. We found ourselves constantly battling for our daughter to put her phone down and re-immers in “real life”...and to stop “Snapping” constantly. It’s how social plans were getting made within groups, and if you were not “Snapping” you were not included.

I was shocked to learn that in high school, phones were so openly used by students, and tolerated by teachers and staff. My daughter would text me often about this or that...sometimes pressing stuff, but other times just “checking in” or telling me about things that were happening in school. One day, she reached out to me horrified by what had happened in the high school cafeteria. She went on to tell me she had seen a widespread message to dozens of students, posted by a girl in her grade, that included a photo of a fellow student, who happened to be a young woman of color, who had no idea her photo was being taken and sent to peers. The student who posted it, used horrible insults about this young woman and told everyone in this widespread message, that this girl had asked to sit with her at lunch and her response was a vulgar rendition of “NO” with more insults attached. This young woman was being made fun of, and bullied, and the better part of the student body was seeing it happen, but she was not. I of course called the school immediately when I saw the snapshot of what was posted, and asked how this was allowed to be possible IN the school?

My feeling is the school staff don’t want to deal with the enforcement of a “No Phone” policy. I saw students who were not even partaking in the phone culture fall victim to the cruelties of it, and still, phones were, and are allowed in common spaces, with little policing of any kind. It’s easy as a parent to feel “safer” knowing that I can reach my daughter during the day, despite knowing the data says otherwise about phones in the hands of kids during emergencies. That sense of false security however, opens the door to a very UNSAFE dynamic for students who have no choice or voice when they are being photographed without permission, insulted and made fun of through phones, at school. Parents will make different decisions from one another about how phones will be managed for their own child. Some will be more lax, some will be more strict. What should be consistent for ALL children and young adults however is that phones have NO place in our schools.