TECH TIP #4: "EVERYONE HAS A PHONE BUT ME!" (WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR CHILD FEELS LEFT OUT WITHOUT A PHONE)

Reader question:
"My 9-year-old keeps asking for a phone. A lot of his friends have one, but I'm not ready. However, I'm worried he'll feel left out, because he's not able to text, play games, or talk with friends online. How do I help him stay connected without giving in too soon?"

You are 100% not alone and it's great that you're thinking this through intentionally. Many parents are hitting pause on smartphones, but still want their kids to feel socially included.

✅ **Step 1: Validate Their Feelings**
Your child does want to fit in. That's developmentally normal. Try saying:
"It makes sense that you want a phone. I'd feel the same if my friends had one and I didn't."
Validating doesn't mean saying yes. It means keeping the door open to honest, healthy conversations.

✅ **Step 2: Find Other Slow-Tech Families**
Your child will feel less "left out" if they know they're not the only one.

- Host a quick meeting or group chat with other parents who are also delaying smartphones. Spoiler alert: ***There are more of you than you think.***

✅ **Step 3: Start with Safer Tools**
When you are ready to offer a digital device, consider kid-safe devices that allow texting/calling only - no YouTube, TikTok, or web browser. (See Tech Tip #2 for recommended devices.)

✅ **Step 4: Build Offline Friendships**
Remind your child that connection isn't just digital.

- Host a board game or LEGO night
- Start a "no screens" weekend day with another family
- Join after-school clubs or sports teams
- Try our **100+ Boredom Busting Offline Activities** list to spark ideas

Pro tip: Put 1–2 friend-focused activities on the calendar and let your child choose who to invite.

✅ **Step 5: Set Guardrails Early**
Before handing over *any* device, work together on a **Family Tech Agreement** (See Tech Tip #1).

💬 Family Conversation Starter

What are some ways you could stay included when you don't have a phone or social media yet?

How could your friends keep you involved?

Click here to read previous newsletters
https://www.centerforonlinesafety.com/tech-tips

Learn more about the 100+ Boredom-Busting Activities that are screen-free by clicking the button below.
https://www.centerforonlinesafety.com/blog/100-screen-free-activities-for-kids-who-say-im-bored

Questions or topic suggestions? Email us at info@centerforonlinesafety.com

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